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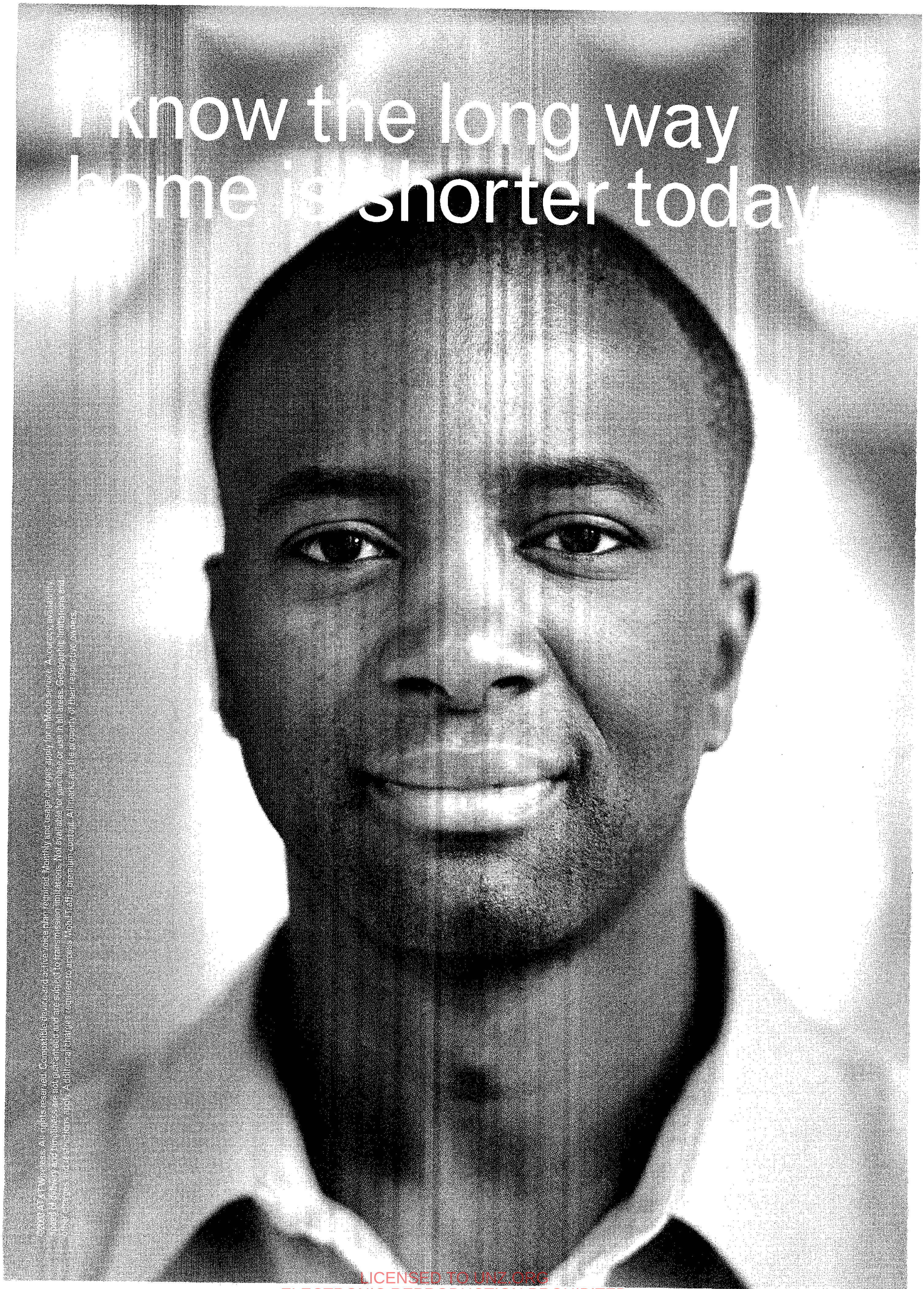

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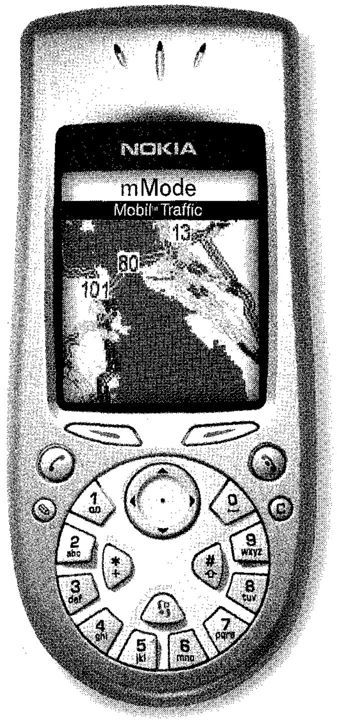

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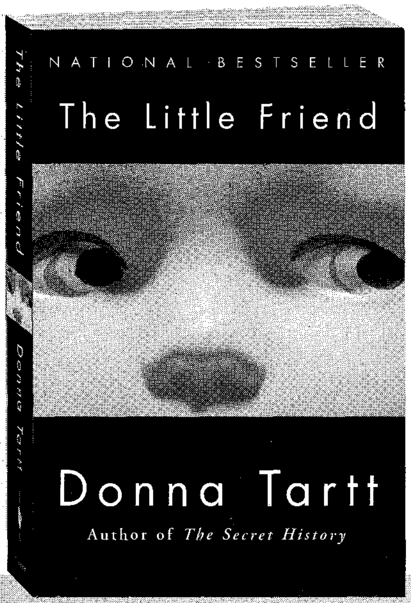

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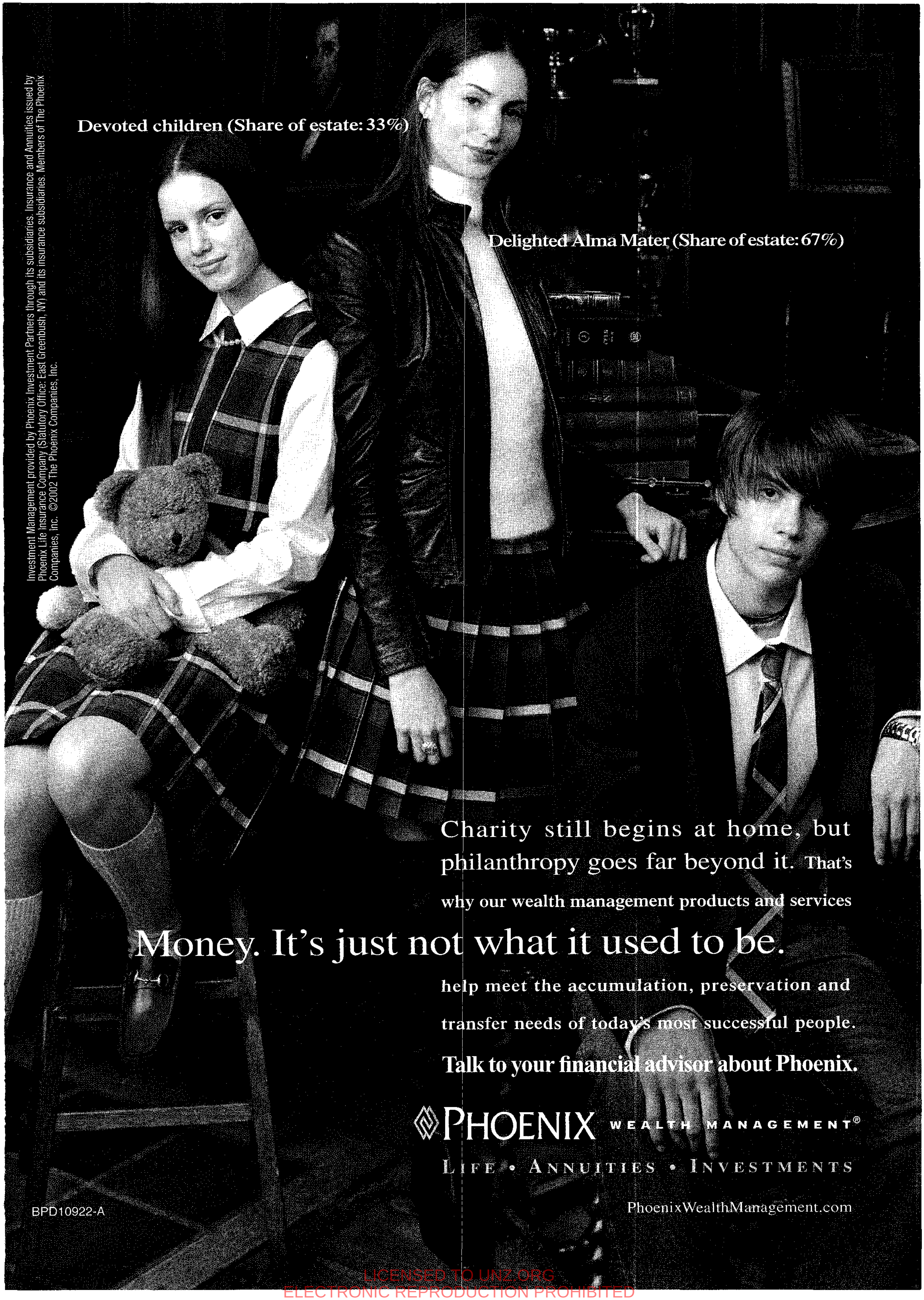Investment Management provided by Phoenix Investment Partners through its subsidiaries. Insurance and Annuities issued by Phoenix Life Insurance Company (Statutory Office: East Greenbush, NY) and its insurance subsidiaries. Members of The Phoenix Companies, Inc. ©2002 The Phoenix Companies, Inc.

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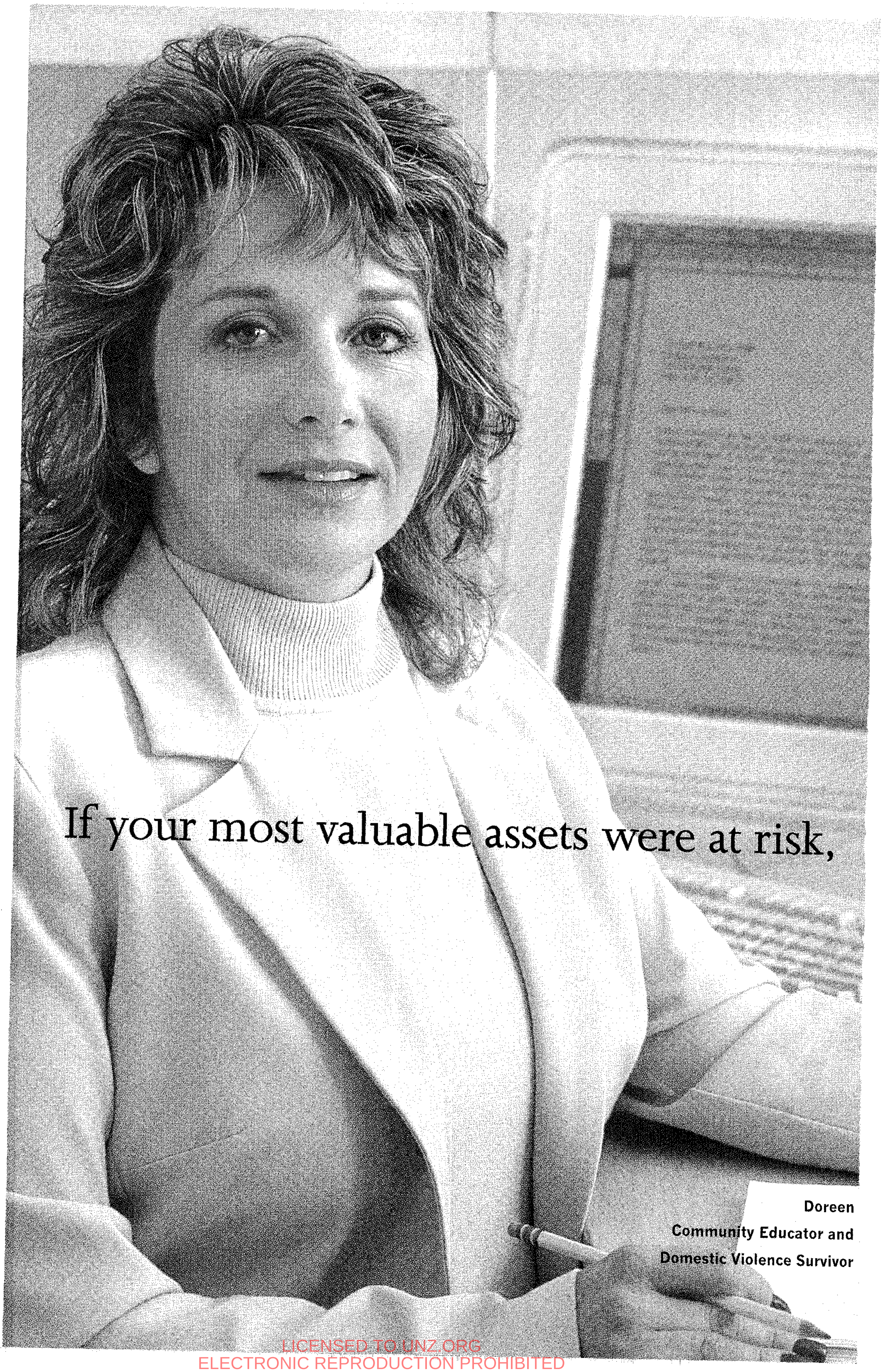
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Domestic Violence Survivor

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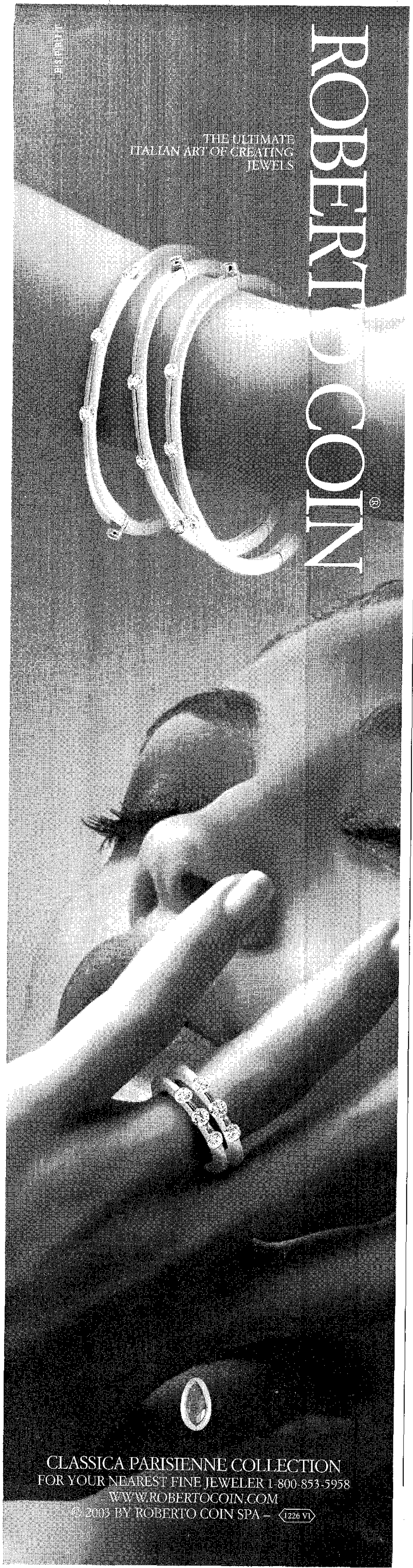
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# CONTRIBUTORS

John McPhee ("1839/2003," p. 70) has published twenty-six books, including "Annals of the Former World" and "The Founding Fish." He made his first serious canoe trip when he was eight years old.

John Seabrook ("Child's Play," p. 58) is the author of "Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture."

Seymour M. Hersh ("Moving Targets," p. 48) wrote his first article for the magazine, on the Vietnam War, in 1971. He is currently writing a book about the war on terrorism.

Larry Doyle (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 56) wrote the screenplays for the recent films "Duplex" and "Looney Tunes: Back in Action." He has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 1991.

Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 104) is the art critic for the magazine.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 108) received the 2002-2003 George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism.

Connie Bruck ("Back Roads," p. 86) is a staff writer. Her most recent book is "When Hollywood Had a King."

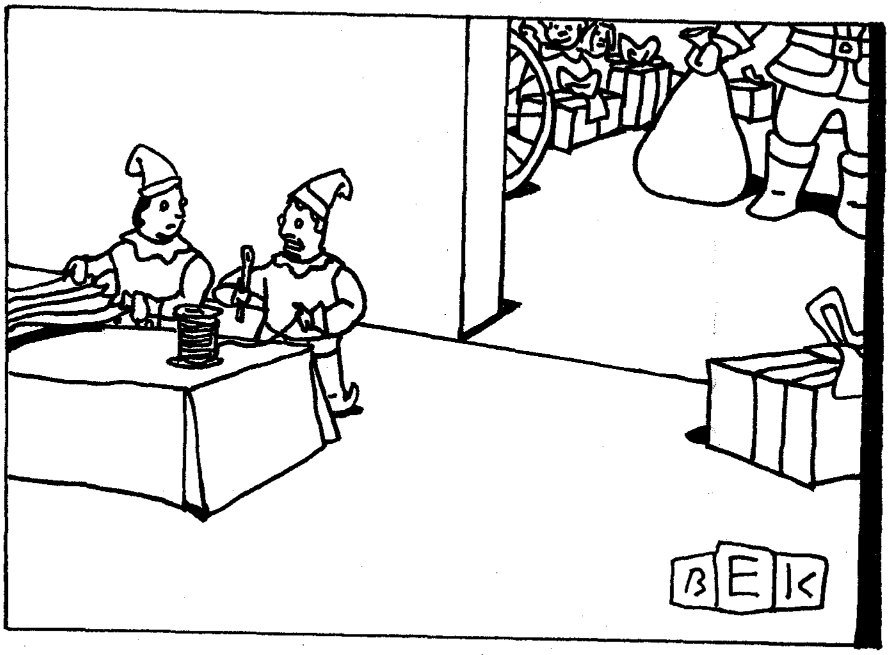
Roddy Doyle (Fiction, p. 98) is the author of six novels, including "Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha" and "The Woman Who Walked Into Doors." He lives in Dublin.

George Booth (Cover) has published six collections of cartoons, including "Booth Again!" and "The Essential George Booth," edited by Lee Lorenz. He has been contributing to the magazine since 1969.

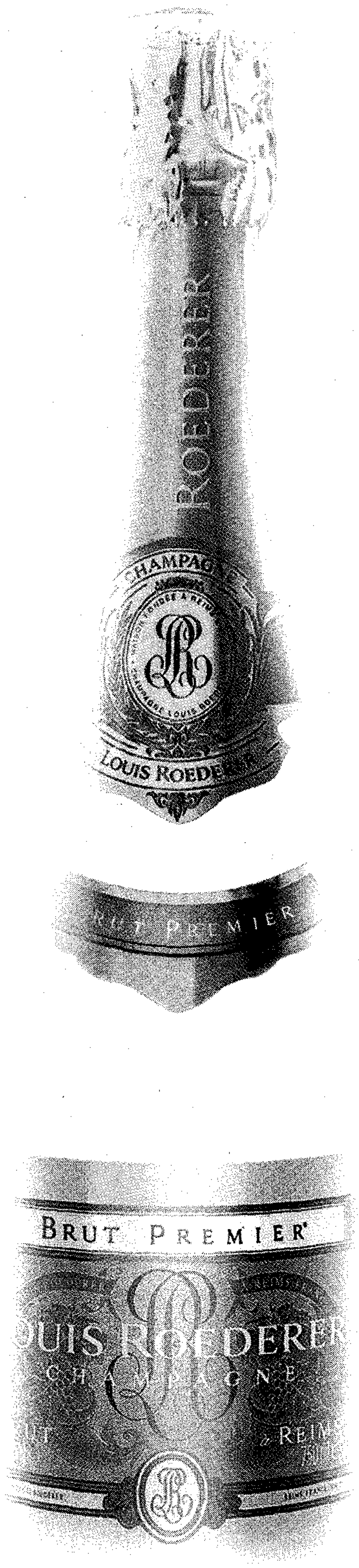
Kevin Young (Poem, p. 76) is the Ruth Lilly Professor of Poetry at Indiana University. His third collection of poems is "Jelly Roll: A Blues."

Adam Gopnik (Books, p. 112), the author of "Paris to the Moon," is a staff writer.

Steve Brodner (The Back Page, p. 122) has a collection of his satirical illustrations, "Freedom Fries," coming out this spring. ♦



*"Obviously, behind all the jolliness there's a lot of rage."*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# THE MAIL

## TOO MUCH DEMOCRACY?

Hendrik Hertzberg calls the California recall election "an exercise in American democracy," and perhaps it was, but, if so, it was a workout in direct democracy, and that's not what we have—or should have (Comment, November 24th). Our country was founded as a republic, or a representative democracy. Originally, to take one example, the election of the Senate was left up to the state legislatures, not the people directly. Only in the last century has this country seen a tilt toward a more direct, and incongruent, democracy—against the spirit, if no longer the letter, of the Constitution. The Founding Fathers never viewed overwhelming, unmediated popularity as a good judge of anything, and Arnold Schwarzenegger's ability to run and win on a no-issue, entitlement-riddled, "I'm a celebrity" platform suggests that they were right.

*Ben Duchek*
*Las Vegas, Nev.*

## COPIED IN CHINA

James Surowiecki is right about calls for Chinese currency reform being a false issue, akin to the Japan-bashing of the eighties, but he misses the larger point (The Financial Page, November 17th). Product counterfeiting and a lack of intellectual-property protection in China are costing American workers their jobs and American manufacturers tens of billions in lost sales. It's not just a matter of Chinese companies making cheaper knockoffs of a popular product under an off-brand label but one of out-and-out theft. Hundreds of Chinese factories exactly duplicate the appearance of products as diverse as auto parts and golf clubs, down to the brand name, and pass them off as originals, at much lower prices. Once these products reach third countries, there is no real recourse. Intellectual-property laws exist in China but are left unenforced, as Hollywood has learned from the market in pirated DVDs. This should be a problem for any country that respects property rights and the rule of law; it is certainly not the type of global competition that encourages progress in the long run.

*Michael Zimmerman*
*West Simsbury, Conn.*

## A PRIVATE OCCUPATION

George Packer, in his perambulation through the wartime city of Baghdad, might have looked at the serious, and controversial, decisions that the Coalition Provisional Authority has made in the name of encouraging private investment in Iraq ("War After the War," November 24th). On September 19th, Paul Bremer introduced reforms that formally threw the country open to the needs of foreign business. Foreign owners will now be able to control a hundred per cent of most enterprises in which they invest, and all profits can be immediately remanded overseas, without being subject to Iraqi restrictions or taxation. Real estate may be leased for up to forty years; corporate and personal income taxes will be capped at fifteen per cent; there will be flat tariffs of just five per cent on all imports except relief supplies, and so on. These are selling points, of course, since security—worsening by the week, as Packer demonstrates—must be established before the privatization of Iraq can succeed. But, given such priorities, it's worth asking why the U.S. stood by during the dismantling, via looting, of national institutions, and pursued the de-Baathification of the ministries, leading to the problem of vast unemployment that it now confronts.

*Carol Brightman*
*Walpole, Me.*

EDITORS' NOTE: The poem by Philip Larkin, "We Met at the End of the Party," in the October 20th issue, should have been printed in quatrains.

•

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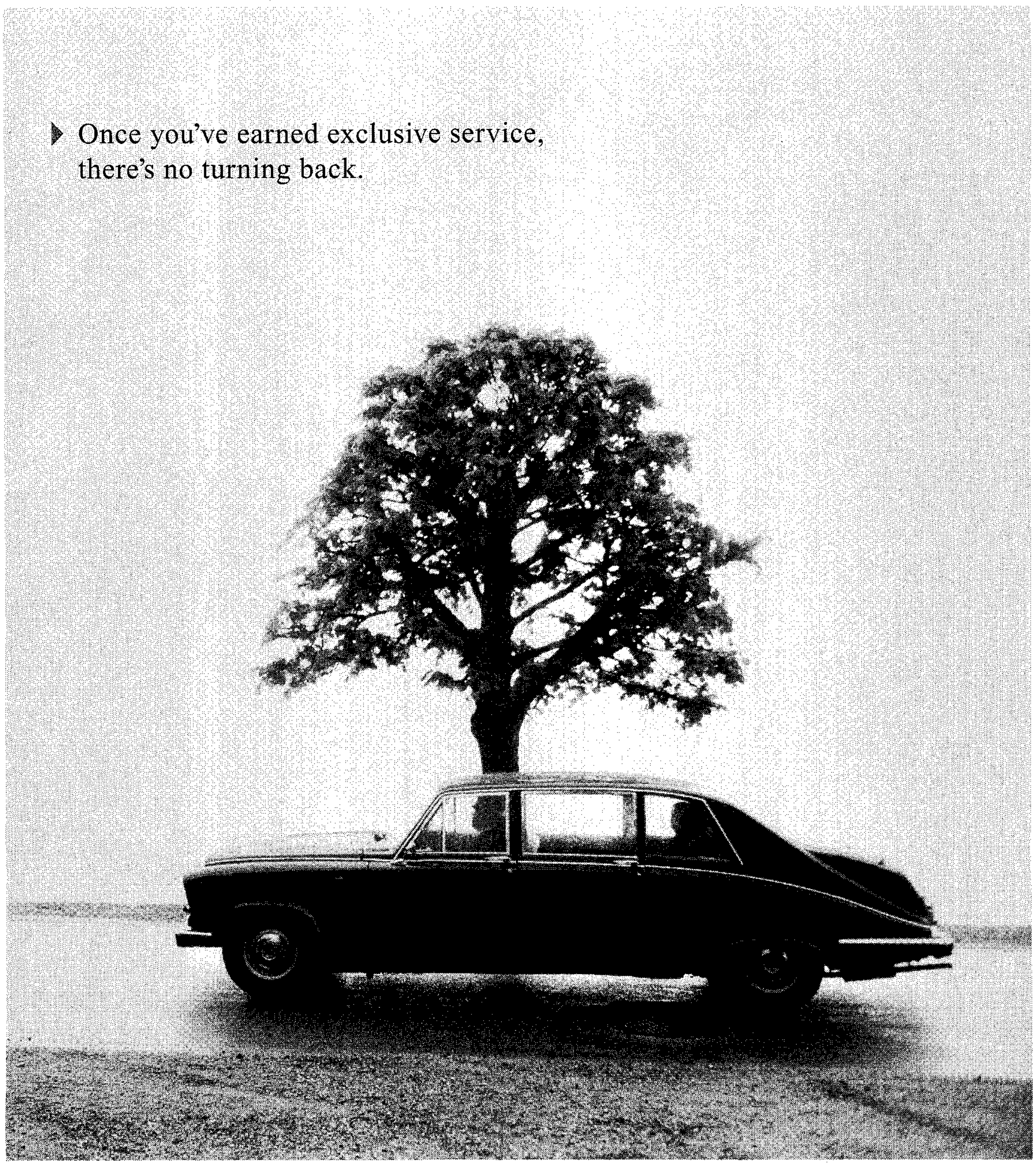
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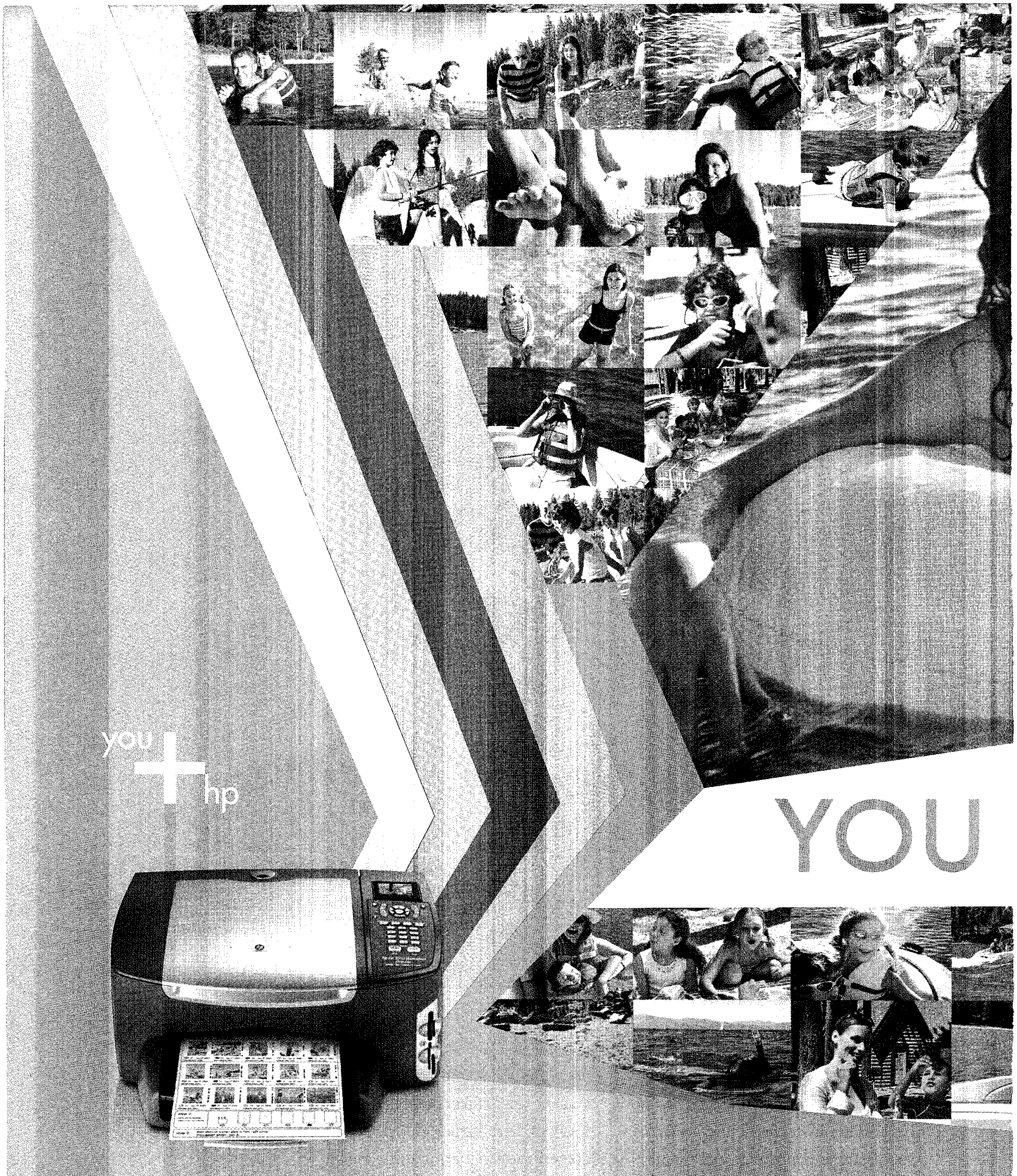

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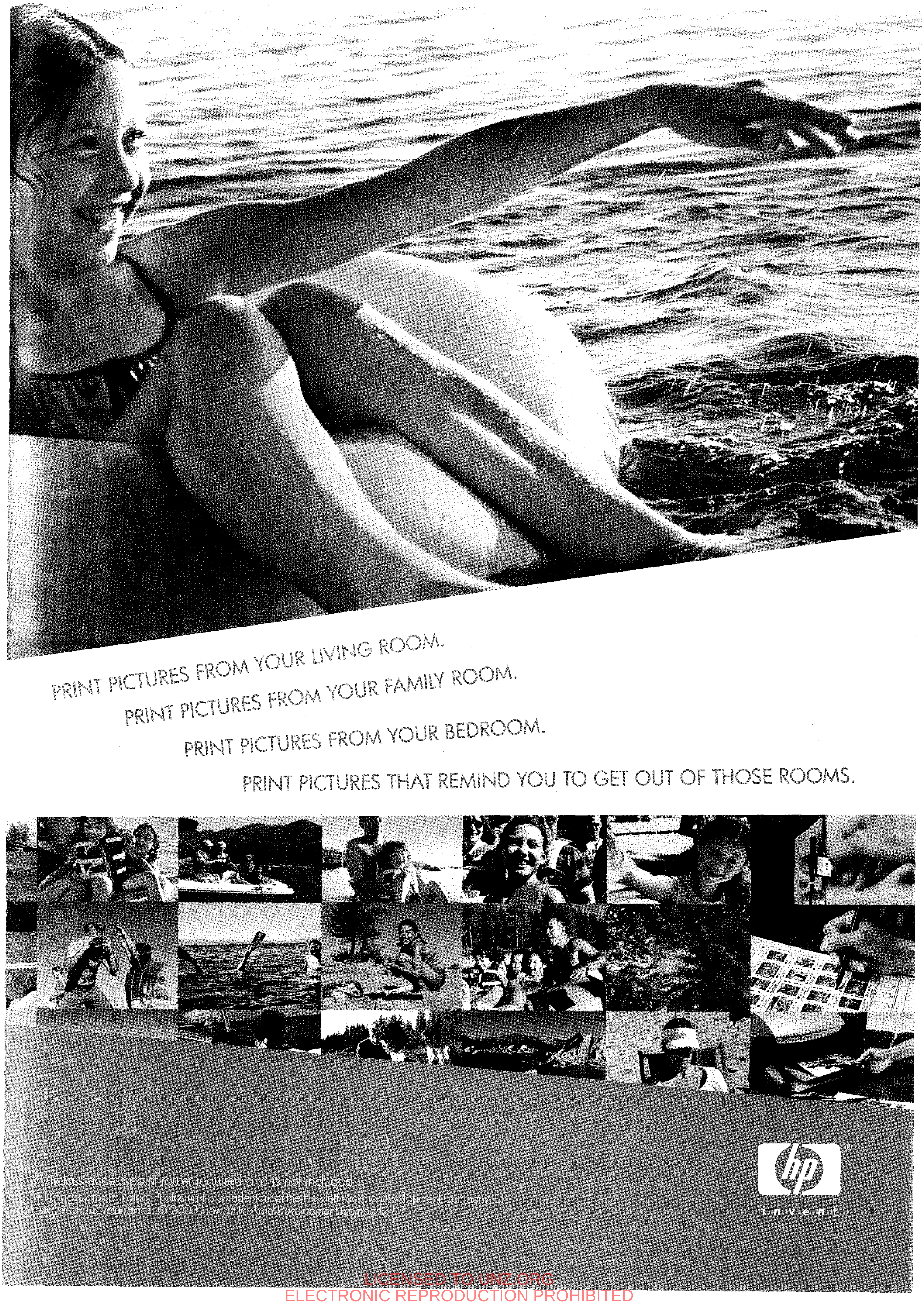

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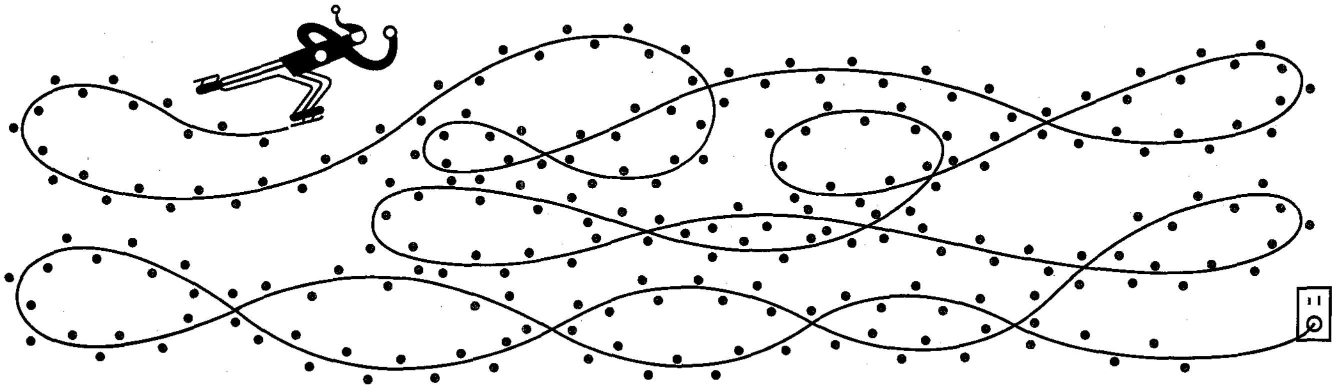
# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



## THE THEATRE
## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.*

**AUNT DAN AND LEMON**
Kristen Johnston is Aunt Dan and Lili Taylor is Lemon in the New Group's revival of Wallace Shawn's play about a friendship between an adult and a child. Directed by Scott Elliott. In previews. (Theatre Row, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

**CHARLES PHOENIX'S GOD BLESS AMERICANA: THE RETRO HOLIDAY SLIDE SHOW**
Phoenix flies between the coasts this month, moderating his seasonal montage of images of American family celebrations. The show plays midweek in New York and on weekends in Hollywood. Opens Dec. 9 at 7. Through Dec. 24. (Pyramid Club Theatre, 101 Avenue A. 212-505-1700, ext. 14.)

**DINNER WITH DEMONS**
Second Stage presents the journalist, food writer, and playwright Jonathan Reynolds, who regales the audience with stories while preparing an opulent meal. In previews. Opens Dec. 16 at 7:15. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

**FRAME 312**
In Keith Reddin's play, which stars Mary Beth Peil and Larry Bryggman, a Time-Life secretary keeps a secret about John F. Kennedy's assassination. Directed by Karen Kohlhaas. In previews. Opens Dec. 11 at 8. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

**MANSAKU-NOO-KAI KYOGEN COMPANY**
The Japanese actor and director Mansaku Nomura II brings his *kyogen*, or "crazy words," theatre—a comedic variation of Noh—to New York. Highlights include "Kawakami" ("Headwaters"), "Busu" ("The Delicious Poison"), and "Utsubozaru" ("The Monkey-Skin Quiver"). In Japanese, with English glosses. Dec. 10-12 at 7:30. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-832-1155.)

**THE REGARD EVENING**
The Signature Theatre Company presents the second production of its Bill Irwin season, in which Irwin revives and expands his popular show from 1983, "The Regard of Flight," with members of the show's original cast. Directed by James Houghton. In previews. Opens Dec. 15 at 7. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

**ROSE'S DILEMMA**
Mary Tyler Moore stars in a Manhattan Theatre Club production of a new play by Neil Simon, about a famous writer who resolves to write a blockbuster. Directed by Lynne Meadow. In previews. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

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**SHOLOM ALEICHEM: NOW YOU'RE TALKING!**
Saul Reichlin brings to life Sholom Aleichem's tales of the shtetl of Kasrilevkeh. In previews. Opens Dec. 14 at 5. (DR2 Theatre, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE STORY**
Tracey Scott Wilson's new play, written before the Jayson Blair scandal broke, puts questions of race and journalistic ethics under the magnifying glass. Phylicia Rashad leads the cast. Directed by Loretta Greco. In previews. Opens Dec. 10 at 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

## OPENED RECENTLY

**ANNA IN THE TROPICS**
Nilo Cruz's simple, lyrical anecdote—about a Tampa, Florida, cigar factory in 1929, where a handsome "lector" (Jimmy Smits) reads "Anna Karenina" to the workers—is really a libretto for a musical, not a satisfying vehicle for the stage. Cruz's charming but thinly drawn characters cry out for song, not speech. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/1/03.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE BEARD OF AVON**
Amy Freed's new comedy proposes an unusual solution to the controversy over Shakespearean authorship: that the Earl of Oxford, Edward De Vere, collaborated on plays with the unschooled but talented Will Shakspere and relied on him more and more as time went on. Tim Blake Nelson's Shakspere evolves during the play from a sweetly yearning farmer to a writer sure of his craft, but it's Mark Harelik's convincing portrayal of De Vere that elevates the play beyond farce. Directed by Doug Hughes. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE BOY FROM OZ**
The charming, wildly hardworking performer Hugh Jackman has been put in the awkward position of having to prove that the Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen—who was discovered by Judy Garland and who married her daughter Liza Minnelli—is worthy of our attention. Just this side of overly hunky, Jackman does everything he can to sell the show, and the girls in the audience love him. But he is undermined by the production that swirls around him. (10/27/03) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**CAROLINE, OR CHANGE**
Tony Kushner's bittersweet autobiographical saga about two stranded souls—eight-year-old Noah Gellman (Harrison Chad), who is suffering from the twin griefs of a recently deceased mother and a newly acquired stepmother, and his family's saturnine maid, Caroline Thibodeaux (Tonya Pinkins)—settles for no easy emotional solutions. Set in Louisiana in 1963, it takes the musical back to storytelling, to a moral universe, to a dissection of American society, and to folklore—that is, the lore of the folk, both black and white. The most extraordinary of this musical's many thrills is its ability to plumb and to honor the ordinary, through an idiom in which the Washer, the Dryer, the Radio, and even the local Bus are incarnated and sing to Caroline. With music by Jeanine Tesori. Directed by George C. Wolfe. (12/8/03) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

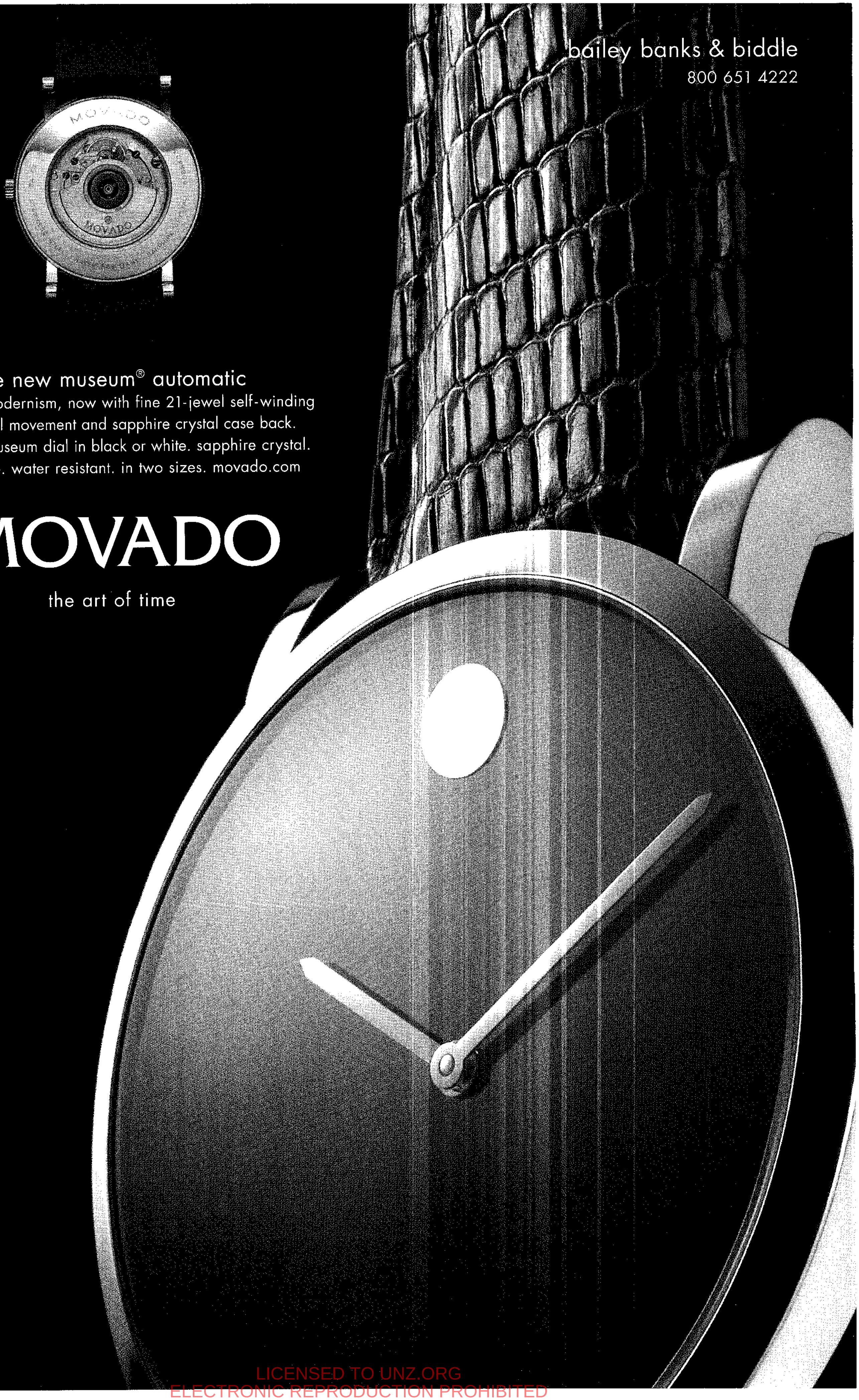
**A CHRISTMAS CAROL**
Radio City Entertainment's annual musical production of the classic Dickens tale marks its tenth and final year; Jim Dale stars as Scrooge. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden, Seventh Ave. at 32nd St. 212-307-1000. Closes Dec. 27.)

**CIRCUS OZ**
The sixteen-member Australian company of clowns, gymnasts, contortionists, and one BMX biker make merry during a five-week run at the New Victory. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE COOK**
The gusto of Eduardo Machado's first-rate play is matched by the direction of Michael John Garcés, who begins the evening with a party in the lobby that segues into the first act, set amid the hubbub of a kitchen in a Havana mansion, in 1958. It is the last pre-Castro moment, and Machado uses the kitchen as a metaphor to examine the oppression and betrayals of both exile and revolution over a span of forty years. Zabryna Guevara gives a luminous performance as the adroit, loyal cook, who keeps faith with her reactionary mistress only to learn in her old age that she herself has not been kept in mind. (Intar 53, at 508 W. 53rd St. 212-279-4200. Closes Dec. 21.)

**DUET**
A new play about the rivalry between the actresses Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse stars Pamela Payton-Wright and Laura Esterman. Directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser. (Greenwich Street Theatre, 547 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

**GOLDA'S BALCONY**
In William Gibson's one-woman show about Golda Meir—the Russian immigrant from Wisconsin who helped create the state of Israel and eventually became its Prime Minister—Tovah Feldshuh shows how national and family passions blend in the heart, making dispassionate judgment impossible. Directed by Scott Schwartz. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)



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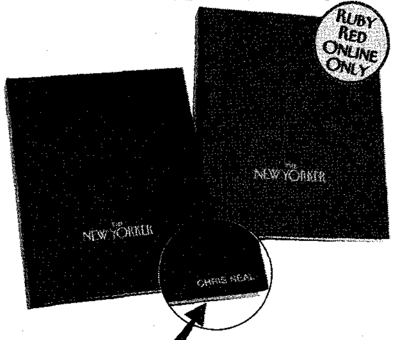

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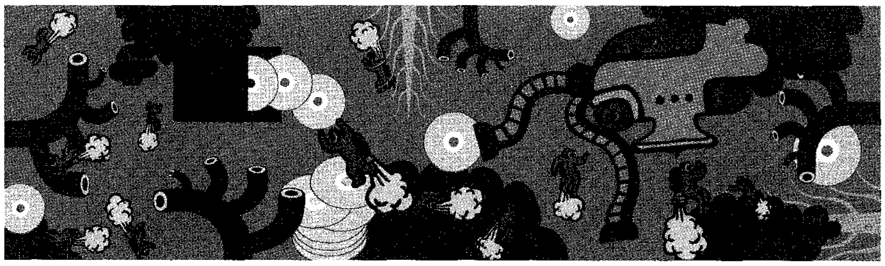
## MUSIC NOTES

### *Thinking Inside the Box*



PETER HAMLIN

CD boxed sets have been in a bear market the past few years, as declining record sales and the popularity of digital downloads make them a bad bet for labels. Still, there are more than a few attractive choices this holiday season.

The late Johnny Cash's last four albums were bold artistic statements in which the producer Rick Rubin set Cash's granite baritone against pop, indie-rock, and traditional country songs. **"Unearthed"** (American Recordings), a five-CD set packaged in tasteful black linen, includes dozens of previously unreleased recordings from the Rubin sessions, along with generous, intelligent commentary from Cash, Rubin, and others. The set is not only a fitting capstone to a long career but a fascinating portrait of the artist as an aging (and ailing) man. Though Cash still sounds vibrant on the earliest cuts, which date from 1994, his voice becomes increasingly cracked, craggy, and wasted; Rubin's refusal to cover up the ravages of age is both brave and moving. In the early sessions Cash is alone in Rubin's living room with a guitar and a microphone. Later he is joined by other musicians, including Carl Perkins, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Joe Strummer, and Fiona Apple.

Next to the Cash set, the rest of the season's crop seems lightweight. The Texas blues-rock trio ZZ Top get canonized as roadhouse saints with **"Chrome, Smoke, and BBQ"** (Warner Bros.), a four-CD set that collects the highlights from more than thirty years of deliciously sleazy Texas boogie. The package has rare tracks from Billy Gibbons's pre-ZZ band the Moving Sidewalks, and comes with a flip-book that shows the bearded trio spinning their guitars. The wildly prolific songwriter Robert Pollard's band Guided by Voices releases **"Hardcore UFOs: Revelations, Epiphanies, and Fast Food in the Western Hemisphere"** (Matador), the third boxed set from the Dayton indie-rock combo. **"Stages: 1970-2002"** (Columbia), a six-disk live Neil Diamond set, spans Diamond's schmaltzy career as a rock-cum-musical vocalist; a full Vegas concert from 2002 is included, along with other live highlights.

Boy George's recent stab at Broadway stardom has put his former pop group back in the spotlight; while the four-CD **Culture Club** boxed set (Virgin) is generous with rarities and demos, it has almost no annotation and analysis. **"Once in a Lifetime"** (Warner), a Talking Heads boxed set, takes a more scholarly approach, with meaty essays by Mary Gaitskill, Rick Moody, David Fricke, and Dick Hebdige. The applied hermeneutics are tiresome, but "Lifetime" is redeemed by its gorgeous presentation—there are paintings by the Russian team of Vladimir Dubrossarsky and Alexander Vinogradov—and, of course, the music, which is on three CDs. (A fourth disk is a DVD with the band's videos.) Apart from a disregard for chronology and the absence of the Sex Pistols (Johnny Rotten, ever contrary, refused to license his old material), **"No Thanks!: The '70s Punk Rebellion"** (Rhino) is a handy introduction to the era, although some of these songs have graced at least a dozen similar compilations. All the usual suspects are here (the Clash, the Ramones, the Damned, Patti Smith, and so forth), along with surprises like Ultravox and Nick Lowe.

At the folkier end of the spectrum are Joan Baez's uneven early-seventies albums, collected on **"The Complete A&M Recordings."** The undisputed highlight is the 1975 LP "Diamonds & Rust," in which the pure-voiced but emotionally distant folksinger shows rare flashes of humor, candor, and vulnerability. Joni Mitchell fans can thank the singer herself for **"The Complete Geffen Recordings."** The four albums on the set ("Wild Things Run Fast," "Dog Eat Dog," "Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm," and "Night Ride Home") relied on synthesizers, sometimes heavily, and they were out of print for years before Mitchell demanded their rerelease. While the box sticks to the original records for the most part—there are only three previously unreleased tracks, and only a cover of Bob Dylan's "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" is noteworthy—Mitchell's song-by-song comments are incisive. **"Must I Paint You a Picture? The Essential Billy Bragg"** (Rhino/Elektra) offers a thrilling retrospective of the twenty-year career of the British blue-collar bard. And Glen Campbell's **"The Legacy"** (Capitol) finally does justice to the Rhinestone Cowboy, who had some of the biggest country-pop hits of the sixties and seventies. This set includes everything from his definitive interpretations of Jimmy Webb songs to rare concert tracks.

Who put the swing in the Swing Era? **"Count Basie and His Orchestra: America's #1 Band"** (Sony) answers that question. Overflowing with spectacular soloists, including the innovative tenor saxophonist Lester Young, and a lighter-than-air rhythm section, Basie's orchestra combined power and punch with polish and panache. The Modern Jazz Quartet is collected on **"The Complete Prestige & Pablo Recordings"** (Fantasy), which brings together the group's early groundbreaking chamber-jazz work—driven by the band's first drummer, the brilliantly subtle Kenny Clarke—as well as exuberant sessions recorded three decades later. And **"The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions"** (Sony) finds the trumpeter Miles Davis deep in the funk of the early seventies. With essential support from such wide-eyed instrumentalists as the guitarist John McLaughlin, who often grabs the spotlight with his tearing solos, Davis expands his musical conception without losing any of the lyrical sting of his own playing.

As boxed sets of CDs have slouched toward extinction, the industry has adapted through mutation, introducing music-themed DVD collections. Most have been devoted to classic rock bands: "The Beatles Anthology" has been a big seller, as have the double-disk Led Zeppelin live set, the deluxe rerelease of The Who's "The Kids Are Alright," and the new four-DVD Rolling Stones concert/documentary, "Four Flicks." But perhaps the strongest idea thus far for a DVD set is the five-disk **"Saturday Night Live: 25 Years of Music"** (Lions Gate), an anthology of performances from NBC's late-night warhorse that range from raw-nerve appearances in the late seventies (including Elvis Costello's famous aborted version of "Less Than Zero") to time-capsule moments from the eighties (Duran Duran, Fine Young Cannibals, and others). Unfortunately, the live performances are forced to share space with music-themed skits that are rarely witty or memorable.

**HENRY IV**

A hero sandwich of sorts, Dakin Matthews's adaptation of Shakespeare's two-part chronicle of the wayward Prince Hal's succession to his father's throne is stuffed into one almost four-hour evening. As a study of public and private rebellion, "Henry IV" is as savvy today as it was when the first part was minted, in the winter of 1596, yet this production is emotionally lopsided. Ethan Hawke is excellent as the brave and bright Hotspur, but Michael Hayden's Hal (he replaced Billy Crudup in the production a month before performances began) conveys no real sense of the prince and brings little edge or patrician sangfroid to his character's louche liveliness—undermining his rapport with Falstaff (Kevin Kline). Directed by Jack O'Brien. (12/1/03) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

**I AM MY OWN WIFE**

Nothing can prepare you for this play's hero, Lothar Berfelde, a real-life German transvestite and collector who lived for decades in East Berlin as Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, surviving first the Nazis, then the Stasi. As Jefferson Mays brilliantly embodies her, she is a meticulous, modest soul. What is sensational about her is her normality. The playwright, Doug Wright ("Quills"), conceives the evening as a sort of detective story to uncover the facts of Charlotte's life, and Mays plays all the characters with thrilling credibility. Strongly directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**JOSH KORNBLUTH'S LOVE AND TAXES**

The comic monologuist ("Red Diaper Baby") brings his newest piece, about a love affair complicated by an I.R.S. snafu, to New York for a short engagement. (Bank Street Theatre, 155 Bank St. 212-868-4444.)

**JUVENILIA**

A campus-seduction comedy by Wendy MacLeod ("The House of Yes") comes to Playwrights Horizons in a production directed by David Petrarca. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**NEVER GONNA DANCE**

A new musical based on the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers vehicle "Swing Time," featuring the music of Jerome Kern. Directed by Michael Greif. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH**

The black South African playwright and actor John Kani still has a few lessons to learn from his mentor and frequent collaborator, Athol Fugard. Whereas Fugard's domestic dramas about political unrest are the most clear-eyed vision of apartheid we have, Kani's play is sentimental and contrived, making invidious comparisons between the South Africans who toughed out life in the townships and the shirkers who hid out from the struggle abroad. Sipho Makhaya (Kani) is the father of the docile Thando (Warona Seane), whose English cousin, Mandisa (Esmeralda Bihl), arrives in the Old Country with a portfolio of fashion drawings and lots of liquor and cigarettes. Mandisa upsets everything, and the obvious and stilted way that the plot unfolds taxes the audience's patience: it's South Africa for beginners. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

**THE RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR**

The Rockettes perform their annual kickfest, alongside Santa, his reindeer, and assorted elves. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Closes Jan. 4.)

**RIGHT YOU ARE**

The National Actors Theatre presents a play by Luigi Pirandello, about people who pry into the private lives of newcomers to their community, in a translation by Eric Bentley. Directed by Fabrizio Melano. (Schimmel Center for the Arts at Pace University, Spruce St. between Park Row and Gold St. 212-239-6200.)

**A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT**

The irreverent theatrical group Les Frères Corbusier presents a musical production about the history of Scientology, performed by children, with text and music by Kyle Jarrow. Directed by Alex Timbers. (The Tank, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-868-4444.)

**WHERE WE'RE BORN**

In Lucy Thurber's fatalistic drama, Lily returns from college to her grim Massachusetts home town and falls in with her cousin Tony, a well-meaning blue-collar worker whose life is at a dead end at the age of twenty-three. The bond between the cousins (played by Marin Ireland and Thomas Sadowski) is complicated by Tony's girlfriend, Franky (the commanding Sara Surrey), who develops a passion for Lily, too, and lets the impulse move from unexpressed to explicit. Sharply directed by Will Frears. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. Closes Dec. 21.)

**WICKED**

A new musical telling the backstory of "The Wizard of Oz" is an exercise in high camp. "The Wizard of Oz" was dedicated to hope; "Wicked" is dedicated to irony. The Wicked Witch, Elphaba (played by the excellent Idina Menzel), turns out to be good, while Glinda the Good (Kristen Chenoweth) is exposed as a smug, ambitious, manipulative bitch, with little talent for sorcery. (11/10/03) (Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.)

**WONDERFUL TOWN**

The musical from 1953, about two spirited Ohio sisters' adventures in Greenwich Village, is a buoyant, beautifully staged revival that gives us back a thrilling glimpse of the gaiety, wit, confidence, and craft of the American musical in its populist heyday. The show boasts a well-played, fizzy Leonard Bernstein score and a terrific set of Comden and Green lyrics that stop the show several times, with a special huzzah for "One Hundred Easy Ways (to Lose a Man)." The excellent cast is superbly directed and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall. As Eileen, Jennifer Westfeldt swings, but Donna Murphy, as her sardonic, droll sister Ruth, owns the stage. This is one of those musicals that made

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the myth of Manhattan as an isle of joy. And after the sublimely silly seven-minute "Conga!" you almost believe it. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

## DANCE

**NEW YORK CITY BALLET**
In Balanchine's "Nutcracker," the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland exactly what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's imagination rose to meet it. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 10-11 and Dec. 16 at 6, Dec. 12 at 8, Dec. 13 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 14 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 4.)

**COMPAGNIE MARIE CHOUINARD**
The French-Canadian company, much in demand on the European touring circuit, features bare skin, screaming, and war paint, but Chouinard doesn't exactly unleash the primordial scene—she harnesses it. In "Cri du Monde," which grew out of Chouinard's study of the articulation of the arm, dancers wearing nothing but black tights and strategically applied lines of paint pounce on one another in brief, lustful encounters. Another work, "24 Preludes," has similarly exuberant costuming but is more formal. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 9-13 at 8.)

*The child cast of Les Frères Corbusier's ironic musical for adults, "A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant."*

SYLVIA PLACHY

**"THE FLIGHT PROJECT"**
Ohio's Dayton Contemporary Dance Company performs an eclectic collection of new dances, created by six prominent choreographers—Bill T. Jones, Sir Warren Spears, Dwight Rhoden, Bebe Miller, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and Doug Varone—to commemorate the centennial of the first flight of the Daytonians Orville and Wilbur Wright. The dances approach aviation metaphorically; Zollar's "Eurydice's Flight" draws on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice; Spears's "On the Wings of Angels" honors the Tuskegee Airmen. In Varone's "The Beating of Wings," set to Stravinsky's suite from "The Firebird," a woman struggles to get aloft against the will of the crowd that encircles her and, finally, succeeds. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 9-13 at 7:30.)

**SAVION GLOVER**
The last time Glover performed at the Joyce, in 1991, he was a seventeen-year-old wunderkind who stole the show as a guest star. This time, the stage is all his—and for three weeks straight, in the longest run ever granted a tap dancer. The format is informal, but expect extraordinary, exploratory improvisations by Glover (he's been deep into Coltrane lately), as well as precise group numbers he's choreographed for his latest company, Tii Dii. With its equal-gender ratio, the group is a testament to a seldom noticed aspect of Glover's influence: the rise of hard-hitting women. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 16 at 8. Through Jan. 4.)

**ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE**
Now in its forty-fifth year, the company faces a familiar problem: finding a repertory worthy of its superlative dancers. The answers this season include new productions of old hits—Judith Jamison's "Hymn" (1993), Donald McKayle's "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder" (1959), and many new works. This week features several premières: Robert Battle's joyous quintet "Juba," Alonzo King's "Heartsong," and Dwight Rhoden's "Bounty Verses," an ensemble piece for thirteen dancers, set to music by Steve Reich, Kurt Cobain, Bach, and Beethoven. With live music on the evenings of Dec. 9 and Dec. 13, for McKayles's "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder." ♦ Dec. 9 at 8: "Night Creature," "Cry," "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: "Grace," "Juba," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Prayers from the Edge," and "Grace." ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Serving Nia," "Treading," "Heartsongs," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 13 at 2: "Heartsongs," "Juba," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 13 at 8: "Heartsongs," "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder," and "The Winter in Lisbon." ♦ Dec. 14 at 3: "Serving Nia," "Treading," "Juba," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 14 at 7:30: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Rainbow 'Round My Shoulder," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 16 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Bounty Verses," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**"THE SWAN LAKE"**
The "Central Station" festival of Eastern and Central European choreographers, jointly hosted by Danspace, Dance Theatre Workshop, and P.S. 122, continues with the Von Krahl Theatre's politically charged staging of "Swan Lake," directed by Peeter Jalakas and choreographed by Sasha Pelyaev. The Estonian company treats the ballet as an allegory of Soviet-era oppression. Ballerinas and men in military dress cross the stage, passing Communist scenes screened on sheets that hang from clotheslines, and characters evoke Lenin, Marx, or Engels, as well as Odette and Odile. With a live performance of Tchaikovsky's music, in an arrangement by Sergei Zagny. A free panel discussion on the symbolism of "Swan Lake" in the Soviet period takes place Dec. 9 at 6 at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. For reservations, call 212-870-1605. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 10-13 at 7.)

**"GLOBAL EXCHANGE"**
Choreographers from Hungary and Romania share the program as part of the "Central Station" festival. Zoltán Nagy's "Tifton 328" melds Hungarian folk dance with contemporary movement; Ioana Popovici's "Requiem for a Dog" is a meditation on self-imposed isolation. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 11-13 at 7:30.)

**"NEW DANCES AT JUILLIARD EDITION 2003"**
Students perform new dances by experienced choreographers. In "Beyond Two," created by Thaddeus Davis and set to music by Nine Inch Nails and others, the freshman class performs a series of extreme weight shifts. In "Splendor . . .," which is set to Daniel Brewbaker's piano concerto "Ode to Kalon," itself inspired by the beauty of a Northern California valley, Jacqulyn Buglisi turns twenty-four sophomores into emissaries of peace. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 11-13 at 8 and Dec. 14 at 3.)

**LA MAMA ETC.**
Two very different flamenco performances under one roof. In the Annex, Maria Elena Anaya presents "De Pasiones sin Retorno" ("Passions with No Return"), a traditional program that includes recorded music by Rachmaninoff and Piazzolla and live music by guitarists and singers. In the first-floor theatre, Indalo Artists present "Accadde Domani" ("It Happened Tomorrow"), adapted by Shigeko Suga, a Butoh- and flamenco-driven interpretation of a play by Franca Rame and Dario Fo. (74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. "De Pasiones sin Retorno": Dec. 11-13 at 7:30 and Dec. 14 at 2:30 and 7:30. Through Dec. 21. "Accadde Domani": Dec. 11-14 at 8. Through Dec. 20.)

**"DRAFTWORK"**
The choreographers Marie-Christine Giordano and Kara Tatelbaum present their works in progress, "Solo for Two" and "Desiderata," as the culmination of this season's Danspace "DraftWork" series. Discussions follow the performances. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 13 at 3.)

**NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET**
The company presents its hourlong, family-friendly version of "The Nutcracker." With costumes by the Metropolitan Opera's Sylvia Taalsohn Nolan and sets by Gillian Bradshaw-Smith. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Dec. 13-14 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 21.)

**"THE YORKVILLE NUTCRACKER"**
Dances Patrelle's version of "The Nutcracker" transposes the action to late-nineteenth-century New York, with a cast of characters that includes Mayor William L. Strong, Theodore Roosevelt, and other historical figures. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-772-4448. Dec. 11 at 7, Dec. 12 at 6 (a benefit), Dec. 13 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 14 at 1 and 6.)

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# NIGHT LIFE

## CONCERTS

**"AMPLE SAMPLE"**
This variety show gathers performers from a wide cross-section of the local cultural landscape. The acts include the dancers **K. J. Holmes** and **Jody Sperling,** the satirical puppeteers **Drama of Works,** and **Barbez,** a multilingual Brooklyn sextet that produces woozy café rock. Barbez's singer, **Ksenia Vidyaykina,** will also present a solo aerial work. (BRIC Studio, 57 Rockwell Pl., Brooklyn. 718-855-7882, ext. 53. Dec. 12-13 at 8.)

**"ROCK 'N' ROLLER-SKATE!"**
Once a month, out where the industrial buildings of East Williamsburg stretch into the wilds of Bushwick, the second floor of a former garment factory becomes a shining beacon of youthful innocence. The deserted streets call to mind an outer-borough version of the 1985 movie "After Hours," but inside a year-old arts-and-culture center, people are on roller skates, laughing and spinning circles around a rock-and-roll band. The musicians play inside a wire cage, the room is ringed by lockers, and the crowd is full of girls with tattoos and guys with deliberately messy hair; it's the coolest school dance you'll ever attend. And if you tire of skating, you can try your hand at Space Mission and other vintage pinball machines. (Office Ops, 57 Thames St., Brooklyn. 718-418-2509. Dec. 12 at 9.)

**"CHRISTMAS IN THE CARIBBEAN"**
The legendary **Mighty Sparrow, Singing Sandra** (Trinidad's reigning calypso monarch), and **Black Stalin** join the Jamaican gospel singer **Hopeton Lewis** and others for a tropical celebration. (Walt Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn. 718-951-4500. Dec. 13 at 8.)

**JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER**
A sturdy, often inspired stylist, best known for his association with Herbie Hancock in the early seventies, the trumpeter Eddie Henderson has long acknowledged Miles Davis as his main influence, and his recent recording, "So What," made it explicit. In a tribute concert with two eager trumpet players—Justin Kisor and Brandon Lee—and a sharp rhythm section in tow, Henderson will focus on music associated with Davis's much loved late-fifties period. (Kaplan Penthouse, 165 W. 65th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 11-13 at 8.)

**T BROUSSARD & THE ZYDECO STEPPERS**
Topnotch dance music from southwestern Louisiana. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597. Dec. 14 at 7:30.)

## CLUBS

*Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.*

**BOTTOM LINE**
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (212-228-6300)—Dec. 12-14: The **"Downtown Messiah."** The former Bongos front man Richard Barone, the vocal group the Accidentals, the trumpeter Randy Brecker, and many others offer their take on Handel's masterpiece.

**BOWERY BALLROOM**
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 9-11: The **Rapture,** a much fêted local band who take their cues from such post-punk acts as Public Image Ltd. and Gang of Four. Their angular and often discordant music has an irrepressibly danceable edge, and the band's latest album, "Echoes," was put together by the of-the-moment production team DFA (Death from Above), who streamlined the group's ramshackle sound and amplified the groove. Dec. 12: The stylish and creepy Danish duo the **Raveonettes.** Dec. 13: The **Gourds,** from Austin, Texas. Dec. 14: **Ted Leo's** revivalist rock (recalling the sounds of the British invasion, the Mods, and vintage power pop) is fresh and urgent. After stints in late-eighties hardcore bands, Leo honed his pop skills in Chisel, who cribbed a bit from the Jam (themselves initially a revivalist act). Leo's passionate, articulate songwriting is augmented by a versatile band, the Pharmacists, who can seamlessly shift from bruising punk rock to a jaunty sea chantey.

**FEZ**
380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—Dec. 10 and Dec. 12-13: Ten years ago, the keyboardist, arranger, and pop geek Joe McGinty had the bright idea to gather off-center downtown musical pals and to showcase one select group, composer, or singer. He called it the **Loser's Lounge,** and the victims, er, honorees in this ongoing series have ranged from ABBA to the Zombies. The interpretations, a delightful mixture of kitsch and cool, can be scarily right or brilliantly refracted. For these anniversary shows, the Losers return to their original inspiration, the master of the bachelor-pad school of songwriting, Burt Bacharach. Dec. 16: The quiet and wholesome folk pop of the **Innocence Mission.** The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

**IRVING PLAZA**
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 12-14: As their name suggests, **Mindless Self Indulgence** do not take themselves seriously (their front man goes by the name Little Jimmy Urine). The group's frantic hybrid of punk, industrial, and hip-hop revels in potty-mouthed juvenilia. Dec. 15: The fresh-faced soul rocker **Gavin Degraw.**

**KNITTING FACTORY**
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Dec. 12: David Pajo has been an indie-music Zelig since he helped found the influential band Slint, in the late eighties. After spending time with the post-rock exemplars Tortoise and Billy Corgan's recently demised Zwan, Pajo appears here as **Papa M.** This music is low and intense, characterized as always by his simultaneously mild and screeching guitar. Dec. 13: **Adult.** A product of the fertile Detroit electronic-music underground, this enigmatic duo turns out a jolting mix of retro-primitive electronics and paranoid lyrics that ends up being both captivating and unsettling. Dec. 14: Initially a somewhat gimmick-driven band, New York's **Rasputina** eschewed conventional rock instrumentation in favor of cellos and presented its cheekily maudlin chamber rock while dressed in Victorian finery. After three well-received albums and a few celebrity endorsements, Rasputina has proven itself to be more than simply a one-joke corseted goth band. A new album is promised in the coming year.

*Katell Keineg, at the Living Room.*

**LIVING ROOM**
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Dec. 12: The voice of **Katell Keineg**—who was born in Wales, raised in Brittany, and is currently living between New York City and Dublin—is a beautiful and wild force of nature. After her two major-label releases (the last of which was 1997's "Jet"), Keineg's recorded output has been sparse: a pair of EPs, last year's dark "What's the Only Thing Worse Than the End of Time?" and the new, too short "Shaking the Disease." Fortunately, she's in town performing songs from a forthcoming full-length album, "High July." The album's release is still some time off (and it has yet to be licensed for the U.S.), so it's best to catch Keineg live, where she is really in her element. Sharing the bill is **Katy Pfaffl,** a local singer-songwriter with a thing for sophisticated and soulful folk, and the vocalist **Rebecca Martin,** a talented veteran of the city's music scene whose collaborators have included Jesse Harris, one of Norah Jones's songwriters.

**SATALLA**
37 W. 26th St. (212-576-1155)—Dec. 11: The captivating Moroccan singer **Hassan Hakmoun.** Dec. 13: The Roman vocalist and percussionist **Alessandra Belloni** and members of the music and dance ensemble I Giullari di Piazza offer a night of trance dances, musical exorcisms, and haunting love songs from Southern Italy.

**WEBSTER HALL**
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 16: **Placebo,** a British trio of glamorous punk-popsters with a penchant for androgyny. The opening act is **Stellastarr*.**

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**BLUE NOTE**
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Dec. 14: Long before he started messing with jam-band aesthetics, even before he led his fondly remembered quartet with saxophonist Joe Lovano, the guitarist **John Scofield** had a sure-footed trio. The new Real Jazz Trio welcomes back an original trio member, the innovative electric bassist **Steve Swallow,** and a holdover from the quartet, the drummer **Billy Stewart.**

**IRIDIUM**
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Dec. 14: The **Ahmad Jamal** trio. While the majority of jazz pianists make occasional visits to the edge, peer over, and then scurry back to safety, Jamal lives there. With stream-of-consciousness logic, he reorchestrates conventional tunes, fracturing rhythms and harmonies with gleeful abandon. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

**JAZZ STANDARD**
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Through Dec. 14: The great, lyrical pianist **Fred Hersch** is no stranger to musical duets—his 1997 "The Duo Album" remains a highlight of his recording career. This week he has a different partner each night, starting with the alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz** on Dec. 9. The percussionist **John Hollenbeck,** the soprano saxophonist **Jane Ira Bloom,** the tenor saxophonist **Joe Lovano,** and the singers **Kate McGarry** and **Kurt Elling** follow. Dining.

**NEUE GALERIE**
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200, ext. 107)—Dec. 11: The vocal virtuoso **Theo Bleckmann** may be best known from the avant-garde doyenne Meredith Monk's ensembles; here, he indulges his passion for classic art songs.

**SWEET RHYTHM**
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—Dec. 12-13: The **Junior Mance** trio. Pianists like the underrated Mance help form the bedrock of the city's jazz scene. If his bop-and-standards repertoire is garden-variety fare, his eloquent delivery and sly wit elevate the proceedings.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

*Advertisement*

"I had $23,000 worth of liposuction."

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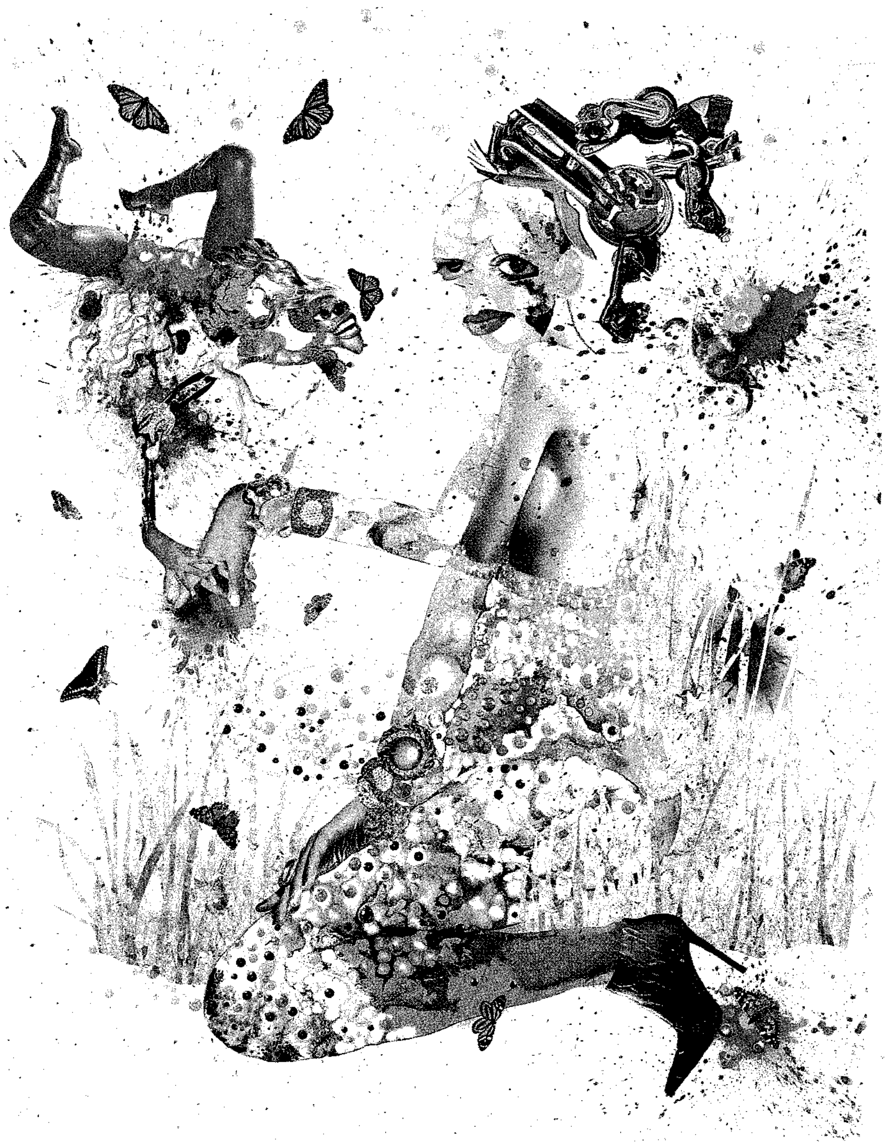

*A work by Wangechi Mutu, part of a Vogue portfolio of self-portraits by women artists, at Deitch Projects.*

**UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ**
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Dec. 12-13: The **Mulgrew Miller** trio. Miller is a product of Memphis, a town whose jazz pianists invariably fall under the looming shadow of the florid legend Phineas Newborn. Miller, who tested his mettle with Art Blakey in the eighties, can be loquacious, but his orations have eloquence and verve.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD**
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Dec. 14: **Bill Frisell** approaches the guitar the way Miles Davis played trumpet: he's a radical thinker who has transformed the very nature of his instrument. And, like Davis at his best, Frisell loves a lot of legroom in his improvising—where extra space terrifies others, it quickens his blood. Frisell sounds like no one else, mating the tonality of rock with the classic ease and economy of a guitarist like Jim Hall. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

# ART
## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—You wouldn't expect to find a subversive agenda in **"Crossing the Channel: British and French Painting in the Age of Romanticism,"** but there is one: proving that the English and French did get along, Waterloo notwithstanding. Examples of artistic cross-influence are on display throughout the galleries: Bonnington trying Corot-style plein-air painting; Paul Huet copying Constable; Delacroix taking inspiration from Shakespeare, Byron, and Scott and even trying his hand at watercolors, which French critics considered a ridiculous "English medium." The large-scale copy of Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" at the exhibition's entrance is a bit puzzling (the original never leaves the Louvre), but his famous "Monomania" portraits—which could be up-to-date takes on neurotic New Yorkers—are not to be missed. Through Jan. 4. ♦ Two retrospectives, of the works of Philip Guston and El Greco. Through Jan. 4 and Jan. 11, respectively. ♦ **"Bravehearts: Men in Skirts"** looks at the many cultures in which men wear skirts and the various uniformly unsuccessful attempts of fashion designers to add the item to the wardrobes of the men in this culture. Through Feb. 8. ♦ **"Treasures of a Lost Art: Italian Manuscript Painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"The Dawn of Photography: French Daguerreotypes, 1839-1855."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Dreams of Yellow Mountain: Landscapes of Survival in Seventeenth-Century China."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)**
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—For **"Artist's Choice: Mona Hatoum, Here Is Elsewhere,"** the Palestinian and British artist chooses works from the museum's permanent collection, including examples by Cindy Sherman, Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Francis Alÿs. Through Feb. 2. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"James Rosenquist"** is a pinball machine of a retrospective, gracing the museum's ramp with two-dimensional equivalents of rackety lights and bumpers. The early Pop work, which uses billboard-painting techniques to create surrealistic montages of slightly outdated magazine imagery, feels immortal. It nails a recurrent concern of modernity: the rolling blind spot of the recent past. Bigger, slicker later paintings succumb to mere razzmatazz. But Rosenquist earns blanket forgiveness on the strength of his classic "F-111" (1964-65), a multi-panelled wraparound work, eighty-six feet long, that distills the madnesses of the nineteen-sixties with supple, violent majesty. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—It was easy to predict that **"Arshile Gorky: A Retrospective of Drawings"** would be a ravishing show, but it was harder to foresee how powerfully it would argue for Gorky as the most gifted of all American artists. Right from the start, in the early nineteen-twenties, until the exceedingly bitter end, in the year of his suicide, 1948, Gorky was a draftsman of unequalled, at times almost unbearable sensitivity. Whether he's working in pencil, ink, charcoal, pastel, or crayon, form melts and jells in shallow, tactile depth at his sensuous touch. Lines are like exposed nerves, colors like inflammations. Nearly every picture burns with intelligent, vulnerable life. Through Feb. 15. ♦ The sparkling mid-career painting retrospective **"John Currin"** will be this season's major conversation piece. Topic: how have super-old-fashioned, alternately academic- and schlocky-looking figure paintings become the bee's knees in contemporary art? Currin's mostly imagined winsome nudes, pathetic males, society dames, gay couples, and, oh yes, women with breasts as big as the Ritz make everybody nervous in one way or another. They also display phenomenal degrees of skill and subtleties of expression. Once you start looking at Currin's stuff, it's all you can do to stop. Through Feb. 22. ♦ **"Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

*Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.*

**GERMAINE BROOKS**
The forty-four-year-old painter, who once made paper puppets, fills her work with stiffly drawn figures that combine the dark, wide-eyed kitsch of Margaret Keane with the uncanny simplicity of folk or outsider art. Brooks's flat and bright canvases look almost like giant woodcuts, and playful titles add a narrative scope: "Miss Albertine Thinks of Her Faith," "She Liked What Everyone Else Liked." The back office holds a grouping of small panel paintings of female heads, each titled "Lucky Girl." Belgian collectors took two "Lucky Girls" when they left the country, leaving marks on the wall memorializing the departed. Through Dec. 13. (JG Contemporary, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-535-5767.)

**"THE FIRE UNDER THE ASHES: FROM PICASSO TO BASQUIAT"**
In the decades since Jean-Michel Basquiat's death, his reputation has been burnished by an art establishment he had little traffic with. There's something fundamentally weird about pairing this ex-graffiti ace and avatar of eighties downtown glam with Picassos, Klees, and Dubuffets from the vault. But the market makes strange bedfellows. And

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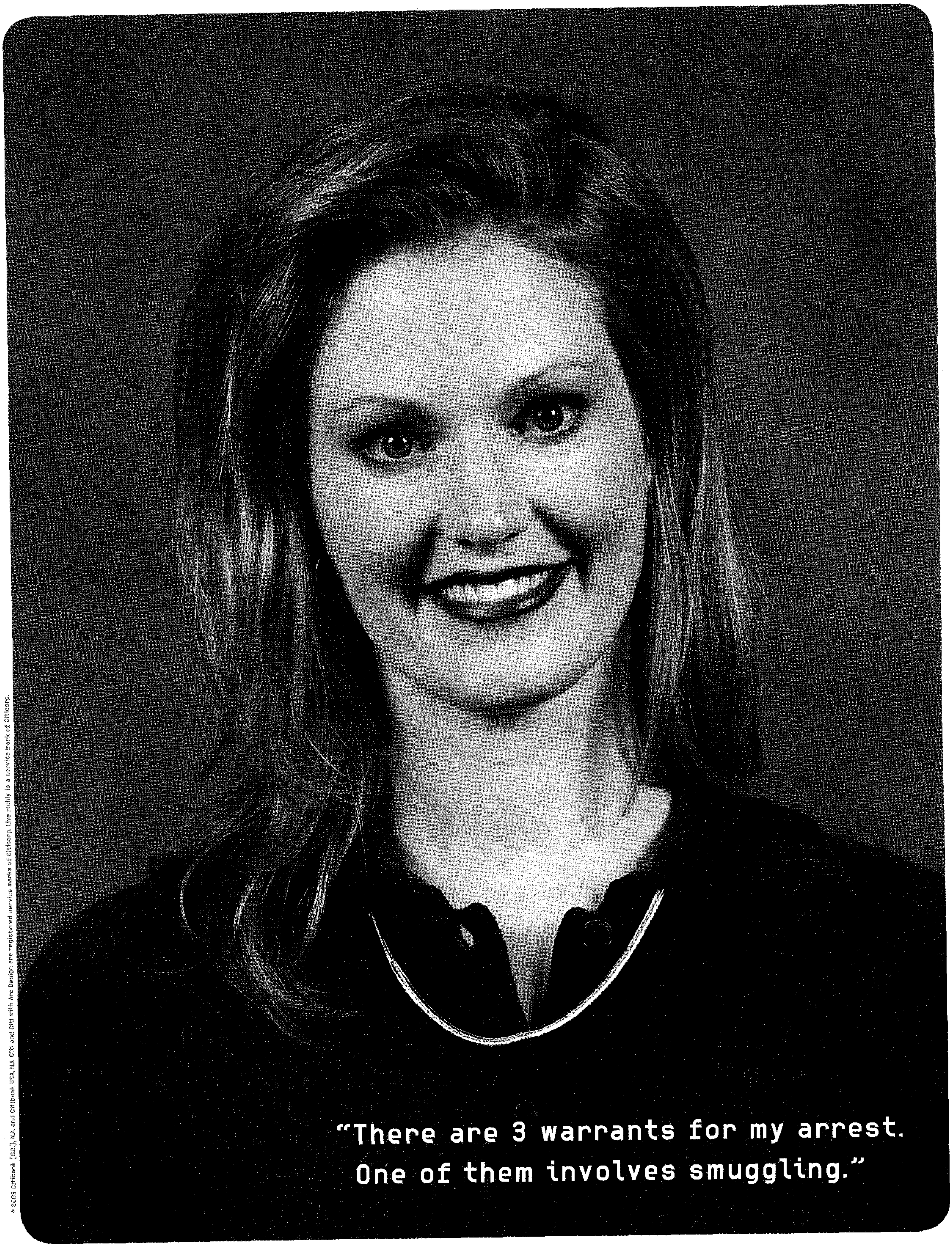
"There are 3 warrants for my arrest.
One of them involves smuggling."

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in fact, they look pretty comfortable together. Basquiat's exuberant, vertiginous mark-making, his scrawled notations, and cartoonish X-eyed heads look right at home beside the visionary rantings of these early moderns, his aesthetic great-great uncles. Through Jan. 6. (Krugier, 41 E. 57th St. 212-755-7288.)

### *Short List*

**KIM SOOJA**
The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673. Through Dec. 20.

## GALLERIES–CHELSEA

**JONAH FREEMAN AND MICHAEL PHELAN**
A blotter-acid-style grid (the print is drug free) near the entrance to the gallery sets a mood of urban scruffiness. "Soul Man," a piece of driftwood with plastic eyes, stands vigil inside. The trippy theme continues with Op-art street signs inspired by the various sobriquets of LSD ("The Beast," "Purple Wedge," "Orange Sunshine"). At the end, "The Giving Tree," a prismatic mirrored sculpture with a rotisserie chicken turning under its base, pays homage to the munchies. During the opening, an aroma of roast chicken filled the gallery; for the rest of the run, an odorless plastic bird has taken its place. Through Dec. 13. (Connelly, 526 W. 26th St. 212-337-9563.)

**GLENN LIGON**
"Bright," "easily bored," "not always working to potential," "now sullen, now inspired"—if these comments from Glenn Ligon's seventh-grade teachers can be believed, the forty-two-year-old artist had a creative personality from the start. These carefully typed reports accompany a split-screen video detailing a session with the artist's therapist; we hear both voices but see only the analysand's empty chair and the analyst's crossed ankles or gesturing hands. A canvas that features an outline of Malcolm X culled from a "Black Power" coloring book hangs nearby; Ligon has added hectic spots of clownlike color on the strangely paper-white cheeks to create a sort of portrait of the artist as a kid in the seventies. Through Dec. 23. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

**SARAH MORRIS**
Nine color photos of pop subjects greet you at the entrance: plastic litres of Diet Coke, bleachers at a speedway, a woman sunbathing by a pool. They're all nice in a ragged Richard Prince-meets-German Conceptualism way, but at first they don't connect with the hard-edged abstract paintings hanging inside the gallery. Morris based her painted compositions on "non-rational" aspects of Miami, seen in both the photos and her short film from 2002 ("Miami," which isn't here)—a conceit that becomes clear only after taking in the paintings, with their palette of chlorine blue, flamingo pink, and Coca-Cola caramel. Through Dec. 20. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

### *Short List*

**HOWARD HODGKIN**
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Dec. 20.

**THOMAS NOZKOWSKI**
Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999. Through Dec. 20.

## GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

**MILENA DOPITOVÁ**
The large color photographs in "Sixtysomething" recast the forty-year-old Czech artist and her twin sister as sixty-year-old women in a drab but dreamlike sixties-era Prague. The sisters, clad in gray wigs and matching but not identical head scarves and sensible boots, drink tea, play four-handed piano, and waltz together, in the no-nonsense, tender manner of old women partnering each other, across a rain-swept vacant lot. Their makeup is overtly theatrical and a video chronicles the actorlike transformations, but the wistful illusion holds. Through Dec. 20. (Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232.)

**ALEKSANDRA MIR**
The streets in Tokyo have no names, which vexes some visitors, so Mir (who has never been to Japan) asked her friends—an oceanographer, a cheerleader, several artists—for suggestions. The results, thirty-one street signs, made in collaboration with the New York Department of Transportation, draw on everything from Italian swearwords and female Black Panthers to the seas of the moon. Through Dec. 20. (Swiss Institute, 495 Broadway. 212-925-2035.)

**"PUTT-PUTT INFERNO"**
In 1926, in a subdivision near Chattanooga, Tennessee, the real-estate developer Garnet Carter installed a Tom Thumb Golf Course to appease residents angry about construction delays on the full-size course; the folly gave birth to the mini-golf phenomenon, which reaches something of an apotheosis in "Putt-Putt Inferno," a playable ten-hole course designed by a grounds crew of ten artists. Visitors may tee off on a platform of mirrored pink Plexiglas, sending the shot under a disco ball and through a sandcastle (by Elliott Hostetter) into the mouth of a crocheted monster (by Rama Hoffpauir), up a mechanized spiralling elevator, on into a bucket of blood (by Bruce Busby). Through Dec. 20. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-647-0202, ext. 308.)

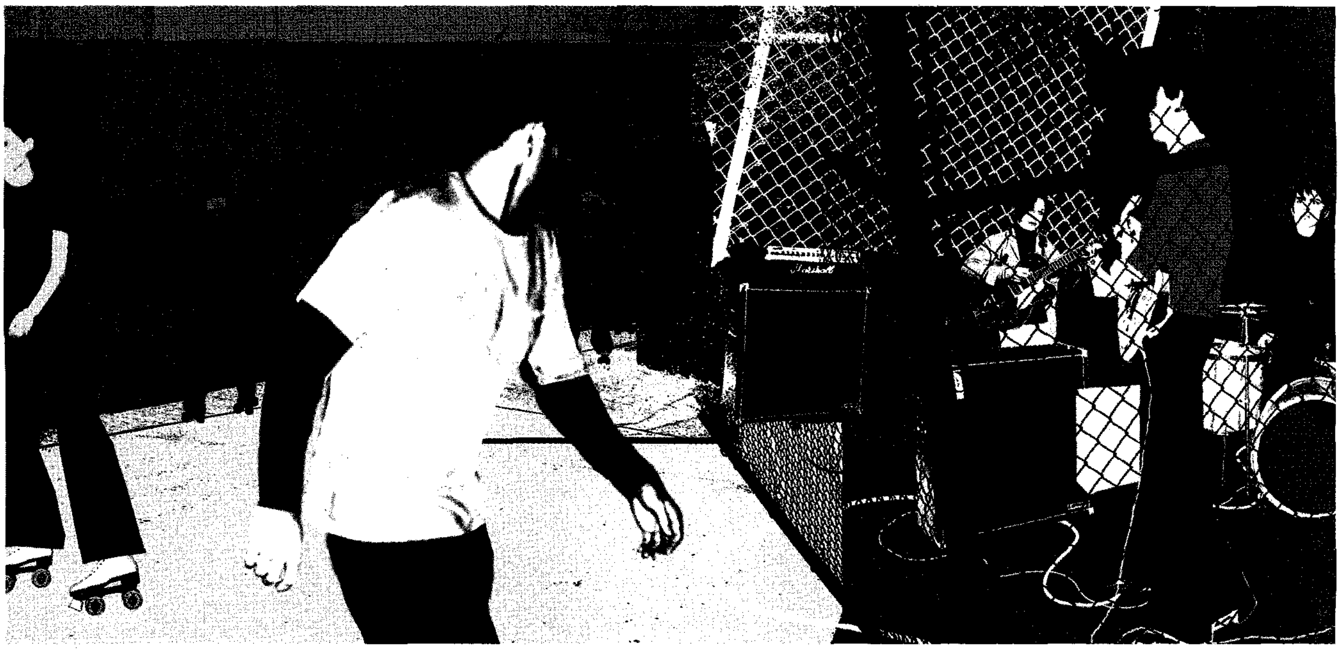
**"SELF-PORTRAITS: A VOGUE PORTFOLIO"**
During his tenure at *Vogue,* the art director Alexander Liberman commissioned work from such artists as Duchamp, Braque, and Rauschenberg. Now the *Vogue* contributor (and Liberman biographer) Dodie Kazanjian follows suit with a show of self-portraits by fourteen women, ten of which are reproduced in the December issue of the magazine. Cecily Brown gives British teeth a good name in nine lush prints of her own kisser, while Charlene von Heyl turns her back on the project in a fast and loose rendition of her head from behind, a glorious fury of brushstrokes tempered by translucent veils of paint. Through Dec. 20. (Deitch Projects, 26 Wooster St. 212-343-7300.)

### *Short List*

**ALFONSE BORYSEWICZ**
D.F.N., 176 Franklin St. 212-334-3400. Through Dec. 13.

## GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

**DANIEL ZELLER**
It's easy to confuse the micro and macro—to mistake aerial photos of sprawling cities for networks of microchips or electron micrographs for satellite images of landmasses. Zeller has made himself the iconographer of this fruitful confusion. His controlled ink and pencil drawings follow a fantasized, composite topography of contour isobars, river courses, and node-and-bridge shapes that are all generated out of his head. But the drawings' true subject is the structure of structure itself, and Zeller imparts a vertiginous familiarity to it. Through Dec. 22. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)



*Rock and roll meets roller-skating once a month at the outer-borough arts center Office Ops (see Night Life—Concerts).*

JOHN RITTER

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**An exhibition of Frédéric Brenner's photographs is at the Brooklyn Museum of Art through January 11, 2004.**

**Time Out New York **Newsday*
****Dallas Morning News **** Publishers Weekly*

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## PHOTOGRAPHY

**TINA BARNEY**
Painterly, lushly colored, four-by-five-foot portraits of tony French people in luxe environments, the latest installment in Barney's "Europeans" series. The pictures of French aristocrats, like those of Italians and Brits in earlier shows, seem more formal and staged than the photographs of Barney's family of American blue bloods eating breakfast or dressing for parties. In one of the new images, young blond sisters, posed in front of an oddly small fireplace decorated with a paper crown, seem too large for the room. In another, two respectable gentlemen are dwarfed by the grand appointments and the orchids of a hotel lobby. Through Dec. 31. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 212-431-0166.)

**ELLIOT ERWITT**
A retrospective show of more than fifty years' worth of Erwitt's trenchant and giddy images, from around the world. Photographs of the segregated South, Nixon poking his finger at Khrushchev's chest, and Jackie Kennedy at J.F.K.'s funeral hang beside lovers dancing in a kitchen, little dogs standing next to their master's big feet, and a nudist on a beach, wearing dark shoes and socks. Through Jan. 3. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 212-777-3051.)

**LEON STEELE**
Steele's richly colored images of the backs and haunches of cattle and horses create their own horizon lines. In one, a streak of white light across a black horse echoes a break in the dark sky above it. In another, eddies of white hair swirl in front of leafless trees. Steele uses the painstaking Carbro color process, ap technique developed in the eighteen-sixties. Each print takes ten days to make and another week to dry. Layers of pigments normally used in oil paints produce a three-dimensional, pointillistic effect that makes you want to pet the pictures. Through Dec. 20. (In Camera, 511 W. 25th St. 212-647-7667.)

**JEFFREY STURGES**
Sturges's large picture "White Brick Façade (Clouds)" is just that: the upper corner of a windowless building that allows only a view of a thin stripe of trees in the distance and the cloudy blue-gray sky above. A companion piece, "Grey Sky #1, Elevated Parking," reverses the image, with an expanse of sky and trees framed by the white bricks. Entirely devoid of people, Sturges's sublime images of office parks endlessly reflected in one another and parking lots hemming in trees have more in common with Rothko's compositions than with post-Becher industrial photography. Through Dec. 30. (Art Resources Transfer, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 212-691-5956.)

**GILLIAN WEARING**
Wearing, who won the Turner Prize in 1997 for her video and photographic work, here assumes the identities of members of her immediate family, using masks, prosthetics, and props that are so lifelike that you can barely tell that she is the subject of all the pictures in the show. (Look for the telltale edge of the mask around her eyes.) The work draws on old photographs: her mother, in a black-and-white image that looks like a high-school-graduation picture from the nineteen-fifties; her long-haired, tattooed brother in sweat pants, torso bared; Wearing herself as a seventeen-year-old girl in a Fotomat head shot. There's something creepy in her concept. Through Jan. 10. (Gorney Bravin + Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 212-352-8372.)

**KARLHEINZ WEINBERGER**
In the nineteen-fifties, Weinberger began photographing a group of Swiss teen-agers who had appropriated American pop-culture styles—the kind represented by Elvis Presley and by Marlon Brando in "The Wild One." Seen now, these pictures of boys in bluejeans with bolted crotches and girls with beehive hairdos recall Robert Mapplethorpe, John Waters, and Danny Lyon. In one particularly striking image, taken in the late sixties, a group of bikers, some of them dressed like Conan the Barbarian or, perhaps, Bam-Bam from the "Flintstones," confront a flock of sheep in an Alpine pass. Through Dec. 20. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

## TABLES FOR TWO

**LES ENFANTS TERRIBLES**
37 Canal St., at Ludlow St. (212-777-7518)—It's nice that the Manhattan tradition of opening a restaurant in an impossibly lonely, graffiti-bombed corner of town is still in effect. The latest example is a bad-boy French bistro on the Lower East Side; in theory, there's an African twist to the place, but, despite the ceiling fans, the tiger-stripe stencils, and the cassava fries, it still falls a few duty-free masks short of a theme. Stéfan Jonot and Vautrin Fabrice, who also run the frenetic Le Père Pinard (where the house special is the feeling that the neighboring tables are having much more fun), have engineered a more inclusive ruckus this time—among the young crowd at the U-shaped bar recently, a middle-aged couple sat comfortably alongside the d.j. spinning Afro-Brazilian beats.

The couple, if they'd been here before, were probably eating steak: specifically, the unforgettable and unpronounceable *korhogofefemougou*, which comes with a charred crust of ground orange pepper and kola nuts. The dish was concocted by the Ivorian chef, Abdhul Traore. Such African accents aren't meant to be authentic—before Les Enfants, Traore cooked haute cuisine at the French and Belgian consulates. But he and the owners wanted to introduce some strong flavors into old standards, a robust approach that works well for sea scallops grilled in bacon with fried plantains and *tcheboudjenn*, a Senegalese rice. The steak tartare, with fiery Moroccan *harissa* sauce and fresh mint, is not for purists—it works best as a dip for the handmade taro chips.

A few diners trickled in before nine, but by ten the crowd seemed ready to ignore local cabaret laws and turn dinner into a dance party. Don't be surprised when you call to book a return visit and the host takes no name, saying only, "So, Friday night, you are coming? I am waiting for you!" (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $11.50-$18.)
—*Owen Phillips*

### *Short List*

**ROBERT ADAMS**
Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.
Through Dec. 20.

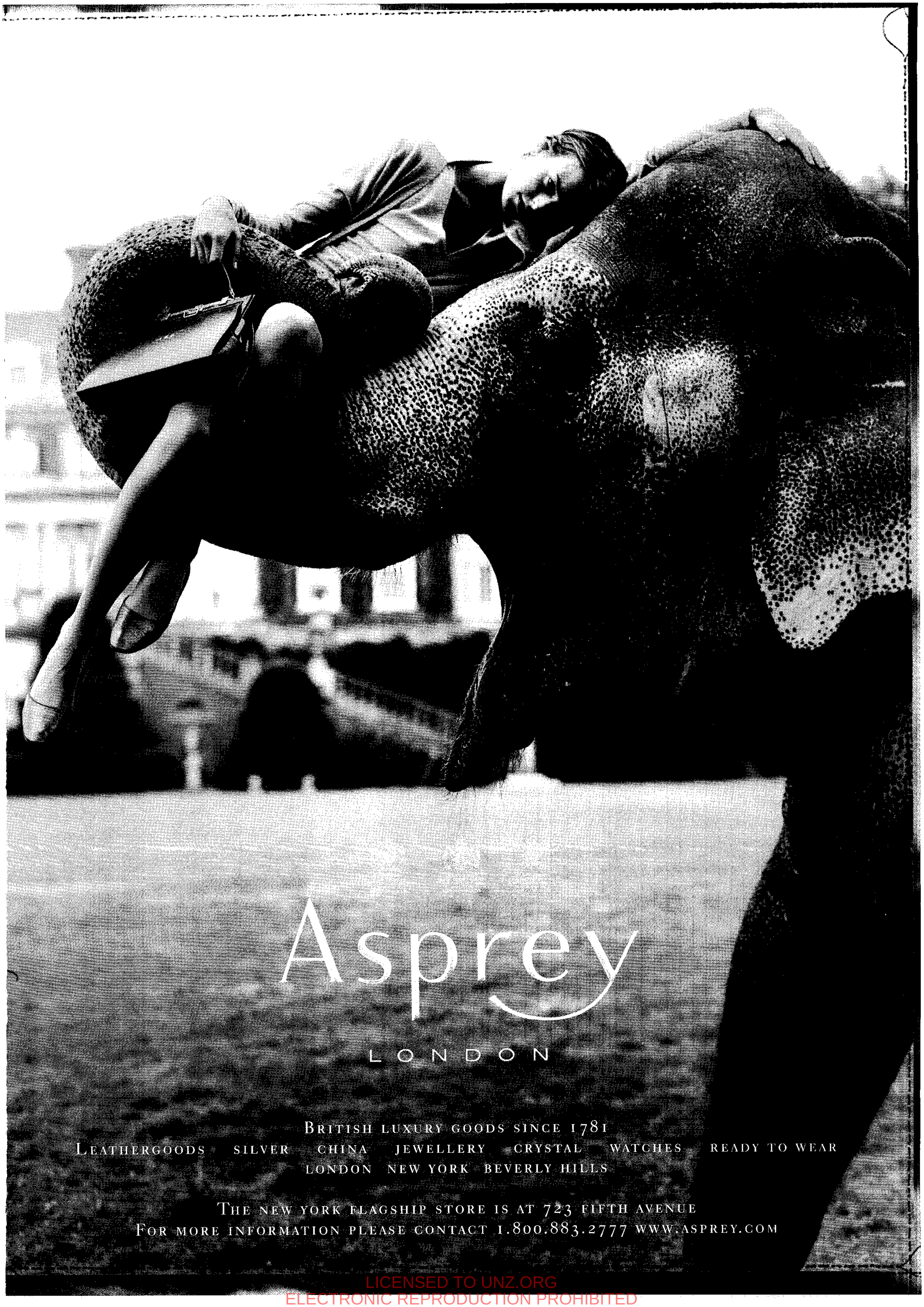
**HENRY HORENSTEIN**
Morthland, 511 W. 25th St. 212-242-7767.
Through Dec. 20.

**MAN RAY**
Carosso, 42 E. 76th St. 212-744-5400.
Through Dec. 20.

**ART SINSABAUGH**
Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.
Through Dec. 13.

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

**SOTHEBY'S**
Dec. 10 at 10:15 A.M.: Books and manuscripts, including Americana. ♦ Dec. 11 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Jewelry. ♦ Dec. 11 at 10:15 A.M.: Seymour Stein's extraordinary ear for talent has helped launch the careers of the Ramones, Ice-T, and Madonna at Sire Records, which he co-founded; less well known is his keen eye, which has drawn him to Pre-Raphaelite art (such as J. W. Waterhouse's "The Siren"), among other diversions. Sotheby's will auction off a mere fraction of his multimillion-dollar collection in a sale that features Victorian paintings and drawings, Art Deco furniture and decorations, and a nineteen-thirties chromium-plated bed designed for a maharaja. ♦ Dec. 12 at 10:45 A.M.: French postwar decorative art from the collection of the fashion designer Wolfgang Joop. ♦ Dec. 12 at 2: Masterworks of modern design, ranging from



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Tom Sachs's "Bitch Lounge" to Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, which is being auctioned whole. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

**CHRISTIE'S**
Dec. 10 at 10 A.M.: Emile Gallé's concern with natural form, expressed in the motto inscribed above the gate to his factory ("Our roots are in the depths of the forest"), was embodied in the organic shapes and colors of his glass vases and objects, several of which are featured in a sale of glass from the Minna Rosenblatt gallery. ♦ Dec. 11 at 10 A.M.: Ancient art from Egypt, the Near East, Greece, and Rome. ♦ Dec. 11 at 2: In the movies, Cleopatra—that notorious fashion plate—never goes out without her gold snake bracelets, accessories that were popular in the period of her reign. A curled snake, symbolizing the dualities of life and death, raises its head from the Egyptian gold bracelet on sale at this auction of ancient jewelry, which includes necklaces, earrings, and rings from the Near East, Greece, and Rome. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

**PHILLIPS**
Dec. 10 at 2: Photographs by Tracey Moffatt and Tina Barney highlight an auction of contemporary art. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.)

**NEW YORK ARMORY ANTIQUES SHOW**
Wendy's occasional antiques bash returns with eighty international dealers in tow. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-472-1180. Dec. 10-14.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

### HOLIDAY MUSIC

**ROMEIKO ENSEMBLE**
The ancient sounds of Greece and Turkey will blend harmoniously at St. Bartholomew's Church when this superb ensemble of Greek and Turkish musicians performs a program of Byzantine chant, Sufi mystical music, and contemporary selections. (Park Ave. at 51st St. 212-545-7536. Dec. 13 at 8.)

**EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK: "A RENAISSANCE CHRISTMAS"**
Frederick Renz's band of singers and players offers works by Dufay and Palestrina, along with music from the court of Henry VIII and a run of carols and noëls. (St. James Chapel, Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-280-0330. Dec. 14 at 3. Through Dec. 25.)

**NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS**
The exceptionally proficient amateur chorus gives a sophisticated spin on holiday themes with a program of Britten ("Sacred and Profane"), Biebl, Kernis, Holst (the melting "Ave Maria"), Schoenberg (his anti-war paean "Friede auf Erden"), and others, performed under the direction of Clara Longstreth. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lexington Ave. at 88th St. 212-568-5948. Dec. 14 at 4.)

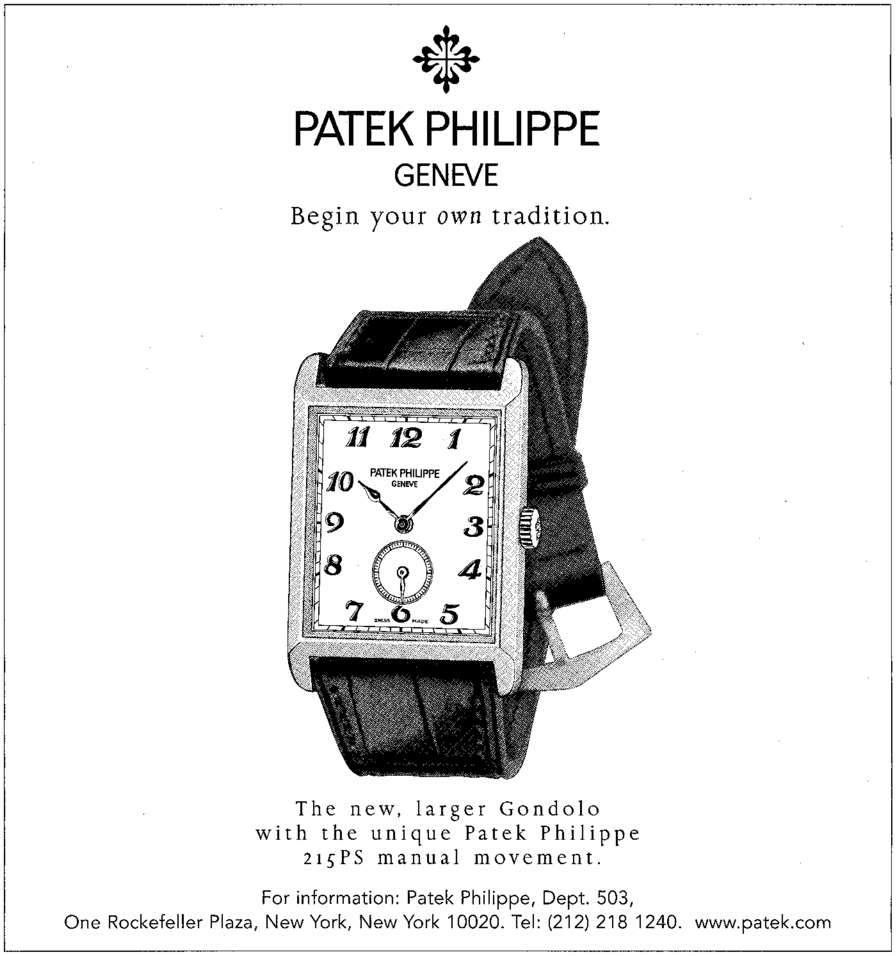
**AULOS ENSEMBLE AND SANFORD SYLVAN**
In "A Baroque Christmas," the early-music group (featuring the cellist Myron Lutzke, a master of style) joins with the dulcet baritone for a program of Bach, Vivaldi, Couperin, and Rameau. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 212-288-0700. Dec. 14 at 5.)

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
The New York Big Brass toss the counterpoint of Gabrieli, Monteverdi, and Brahms across the balconies of the Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 15 at 6:30 and 8:30. For a schedule of concerts at the museum and the Cloisters, see www.metmuseum.org.)

**HANDEL'S "MESSIAH"**
The Choir of St. Thomas Church gives one of the city's best presentations of the oratorio, joined by the early-music group Concert Royal. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 212-664-9360. Dec. 16 and Dec. 18 at 7:30.)

## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**
The revival of Herbert Wernicke's stunning 2001 production of Strauss's **"Die Frau Ohne Schatten"** bows out with Deborah Voigt, Deborah Polaski, Glenn Winslade, and Wolfgang Brendel in the leading roles; Philippe Auguin conducts. (Dec. 10 at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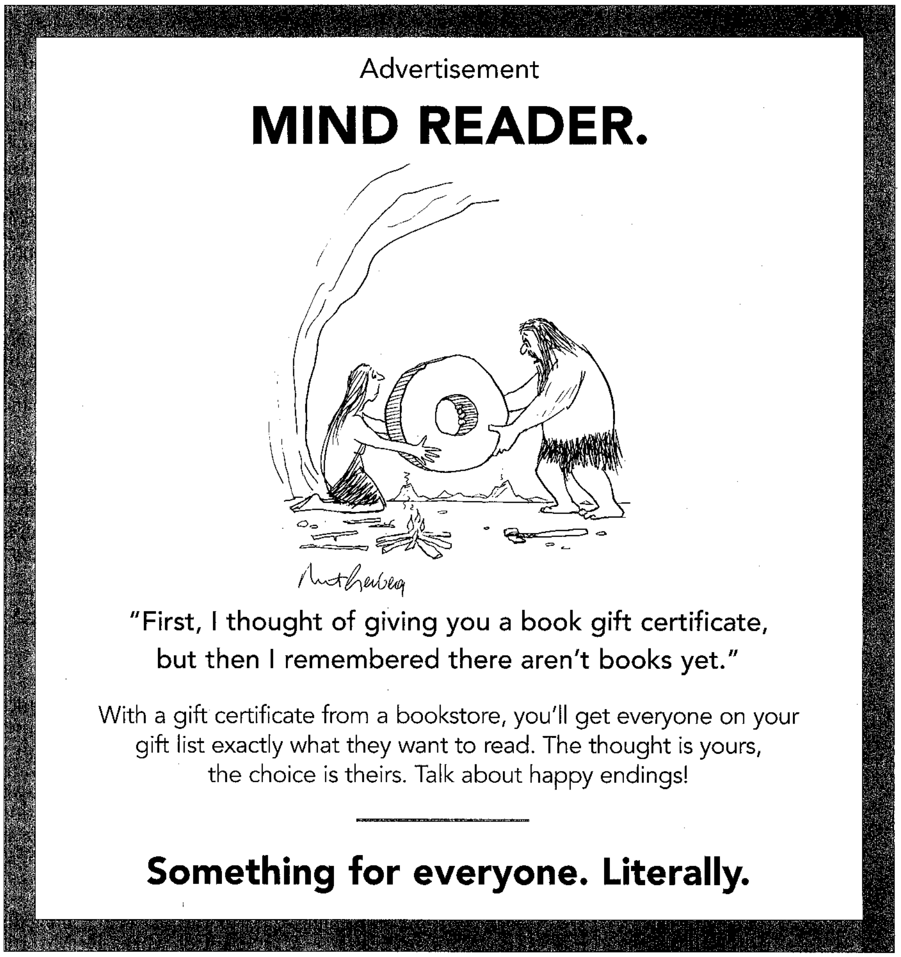
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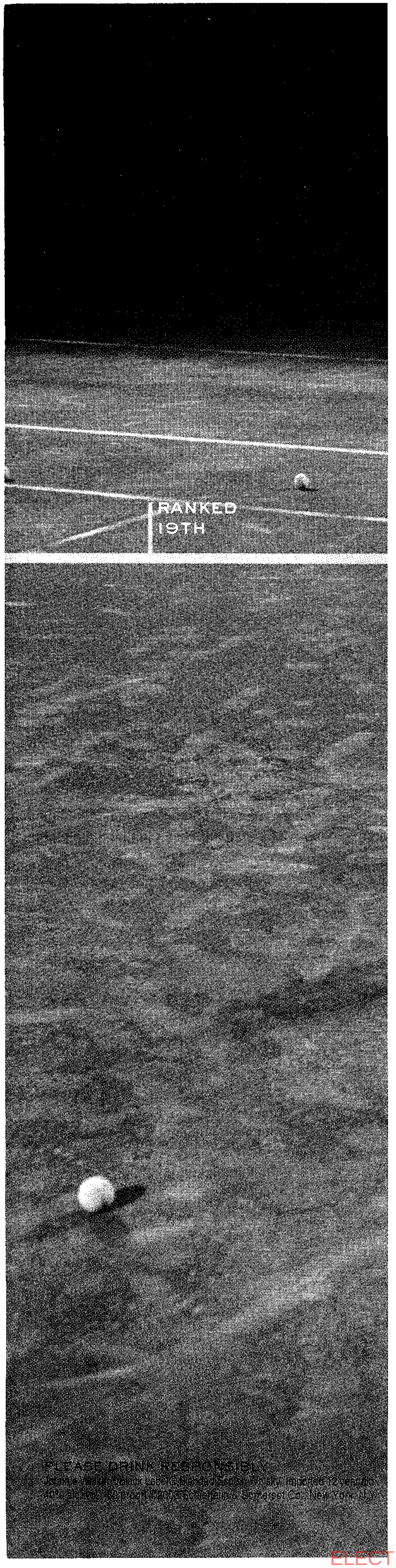
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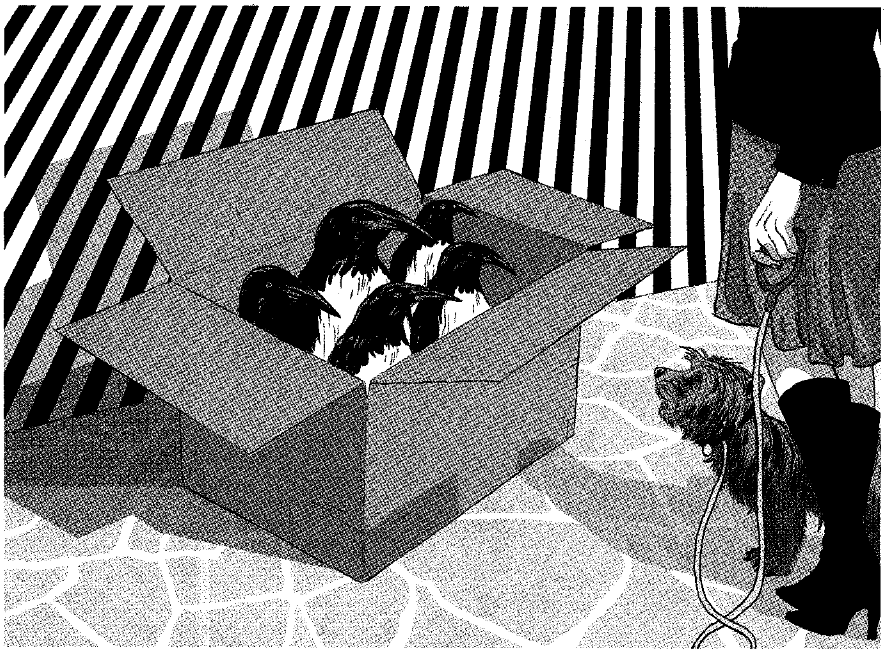


*An installation by Jonah Freeman and Michael Phelan, at Connelly.*

TOMER HANUKA

7:30 and Dec. 13 at 8.) ♦ Another final performance, of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Alexandra Deshorties, Korliss Uecker, Katharine Goeldner, Dwayne Croft, and Ferruccio Furlanetto; Scott Bergeson. (Dec. 11 at 8.) ♦ 2003, a banner year for Berlioz in New York, closes with the first-ever Met performances of **"Benvenuto Cellini,"** a gloriously unwieldy opera, set during the Renaissance, so rarely offered that only a handful of Berlioz fanatics have ever seen it live. The house has brought in the redoubtable Andrei Serban (in his Met début) to direct a cast that includes Isabel Bayrakdarian, Marcello Giordani (in the title role), Alan Opie, and Robert Lloyd; James Levine. (Dec. 12 and Dec. 15 at 8.) ♦ Halévy's **"La Juive,"** with Neil Shicoff and Soile Isokoski in the leading roles; Marcello Viotti. (Dec. 13 at 1.) ♦ **"Moses und Aron,"** Schoenberg's dense and dramatic Biblical drama, returns for three performances with the production's impressive original leads, John Tomlinson and Philip Langridge, and its original conductor, James Levine. (Dec. 16 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

**MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE**
Dona D. Vaughan directs a student production of **"A Midsummer Night's Dream,"** Britten's only Shakespeare opera—beguiling and disturbing by turns—conducted by David Gilbert. (Broadway at 122nd St. 212-749-2802, ext. 4428. Dec. 10 and Dec. 12 at 8 and Dec. 14 at 2:30.)

**OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK**
**"Anna Bolena,"** Donizetti's bel-canto scorcher from 1830, is brought back to life by the conductor Eve Queler's hardy crew, with Krassmira Stoyanova, Jennifer Larmore, and James Morris in the leading roles. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 14 at 8.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC**
David Zinman's brand of American exuberance has always had a steely edge; expect his interpretations of Barber (the seldom played "Music for a Scene from Shelley") and Elgar (the "Enigma Variations") to be taut, incisive, and exact. The two works bookend a concert that features a rendition of Brahms's Violin Concerto, with Vadim Repin as the soloist. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 11 at 7:30 and Dec. 13 at 8.)

**ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S**
Renée Fleming comes to Carnegie Hall, joining the orchestra in a program of works by Mozart, Massenet, Puccini, and Strauss, along with some American theatre songs; Patrick Summers conducts. (212-247-7800. Dec. 11 at 8.)

## RECITALS

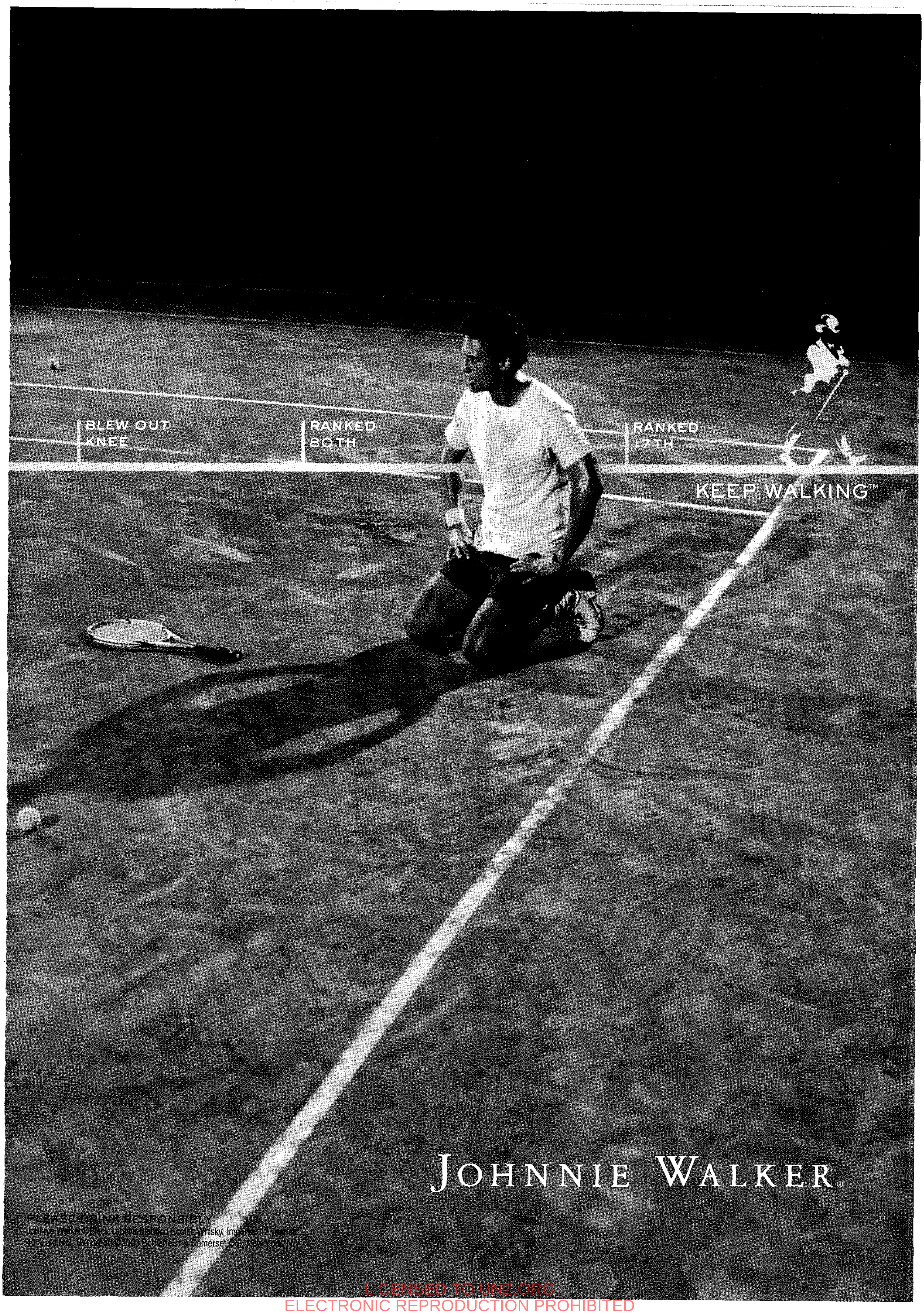
**BERLIOZ'S 200TH BIRTHDAY**
On the exact date of the composer's bicentennial, an eclectic group of musicians—including the singers Susan Graham and Theo Bleckmann, the pianist Jeffrey Swann, and the Brooklyn Sax Quartet—pay tribute to the great Romantic's life and music with performances of straight and arranged versions of such works as "Les Nuits d'Été" and "Symphonie Fantastique." At the end of the evening, a "psychic counselor," Tom Eisele, will attempt to summon the shade of the composer himself. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Dec. 11 at 7.)

**BARGEMUSIC**
Anne Akiko Meyers, an elegant and energetic violinist, is the special guest for three concerts of chamber music. Dec. 11 at 7:30: Piano trios by Rachmaninoff and Mendelssohn along with Fantasies for solo piano by Chopin and Scriabin (with John Neuman). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7:30: The Chopin and Scriabin works, along with music for violin and piano by Copland, Mozart, and Somei Satoh. ♦ Dec. 13 at 7:30 and Dec. 14 at 4: The pianist Navah Perlman and friends join Meyers for a final concert of Mozart and Schumann (the Piano Quintet). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

**MILLER THEATRE: MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN**
The daredevil Canadian pianist, never one to shrink from a challenge, plays Albéniz's complete "Ibéria" suite. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 11 at 8.)

**JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET**
The matchless foursome digs into music by Haydn, Carter (the Fifth Quartet), and Beethoven (the Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132). (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 12 at 7:30.)

**MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Dec. 11 at 8: The pianist Richard Goode explores the emotions of Beethoven's "Lebewohl" (or "Les Adieux," if you prefer) Sonata in a performance with discussion. ♦ Dec. 14 at 8: Nikolai Lugansky, a gold medalist in the 1994 Tchaikovsky Competition, offers his only recital of the season—piano music by Beethoven (including the "Appassionata" Sonata), Rachmaninoff, and Scriabin. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949.)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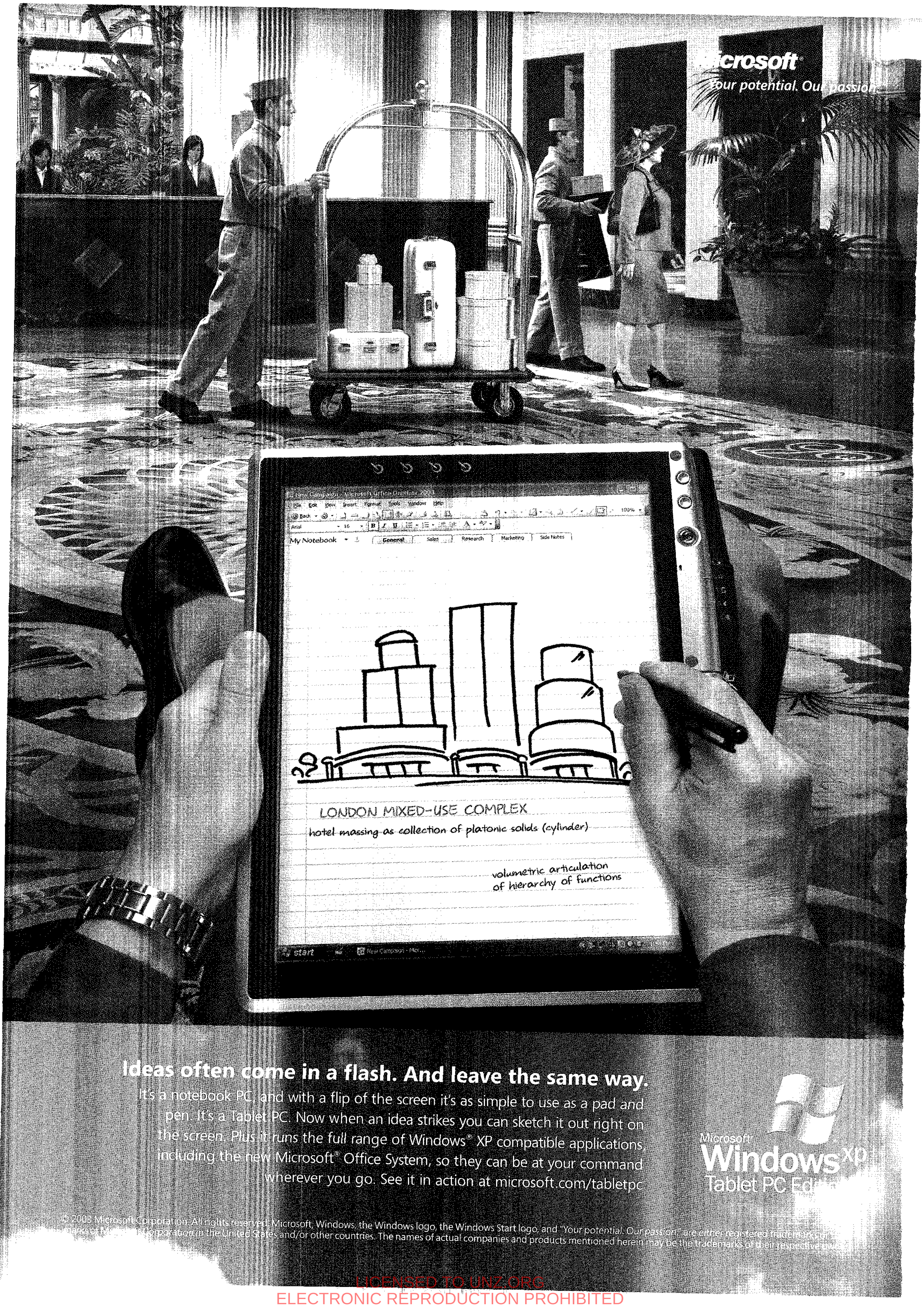
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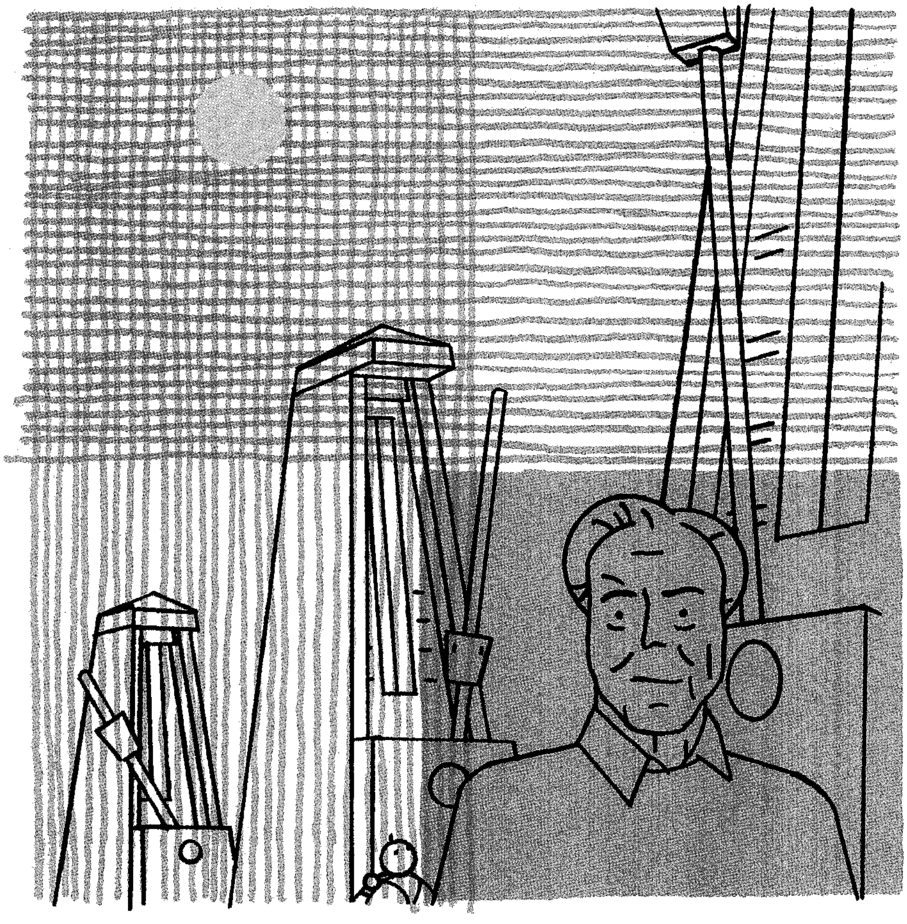
**CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER**
The society's band of all-stars—including the violinist Ida Kavafian and the bassist Edgar Meyer—makes its annual foray through Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Dec. 12 at 8 and Dec. 14 at 5.)

**LORRAINE HUNT LIEBERSON AND PETER SERKIN**
A staged performance of Debussy's "Chansons de Bilitis" is the centerpiece of a recital by this very contemporary diva, whose pliant yet indomitable voice has a haunted beauty. Her eminent accompanist also joins her in music by Brahms, Handel, Mozart, and Peter Lieberson, her husband. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 13 at 7:30.)

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC CHAMBER MUSIC**
Such Philharmonic standouts as Glenn Dicterow, the concertmaster, and the violist Irene Breslaw join the cellist Lynn Harrell for an afternoon of Taneyev and Tchaikovsky ("Souvenir de Florence"). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 14 at 3.)



*Speculum Musicae celebrates Elliott Carter's ninety-fifth birthday, on December 15.*

LAURENT CILLUFFO

**PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD**
The renowned pianist offers Messiaen's epic, evening-long "Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 15 at 7:30.)

**SPECULUM MUSICAE: ELLIOTT CARTER**
With Berlioz and Rorem having had their say, it's time for another of the season's big birthday boys to get the great-composer treatment—Carter, who turns ninety-five this month. Speculum, always a fierce advocate for his dazzling but formidably complex music, has let the Master program his own concert, with three pieces of his own (including the Triple Duo) mingling with works by Debussy and Ruggles. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Dec. 15 at 8.)

**EMANUEL AX**
More French music from this exacting yet poetic pianist, including Books I and II of Debussy's "Images," Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales," and the four Scherzos by Chopin. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 16 at 8.)

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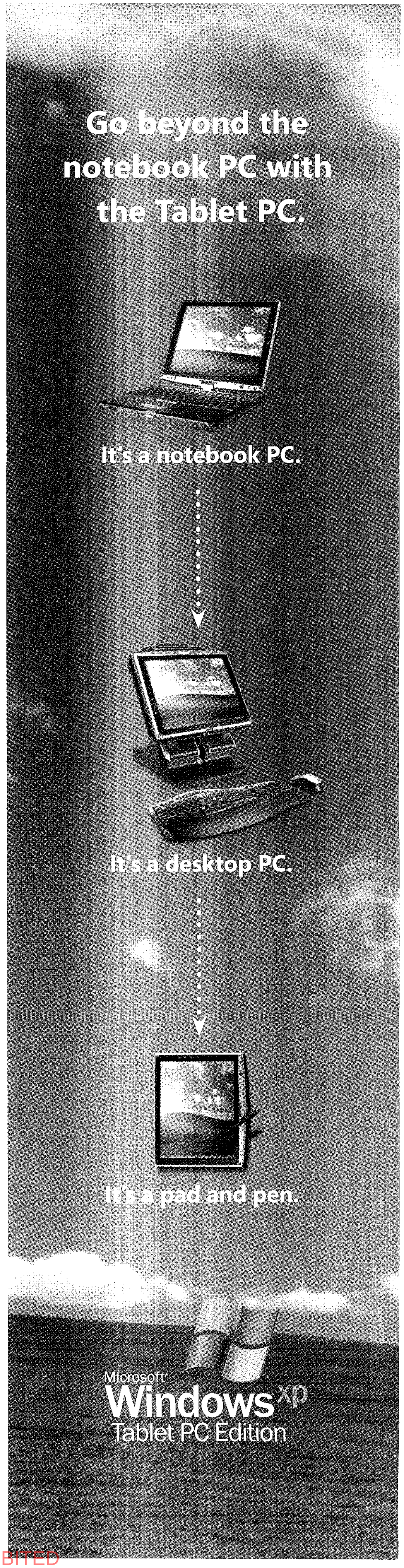
## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**"UN-CABARET"**
The Los Angeles-based comedy series visits New York for the holidays. Performers include writers from "Sex and the City," "The Daily Show," "The Onion," "Roseanne," and "Saturday Night Live." (Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. 212-219-3055. Dec. 12-13 at 7.)

**READINGS**
Dec. 10 at 7:30: The novelists Ruchama King ("Seven Blessings") and Oz Shelach ("Picnic Grounds") gather for a night of stories about contemporary Israel. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 14 at 2: Tom Brown, the author of "The Way of the Scout" and other field guides, offers selections from "The Tracker," his memoir of learning his craft in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.) ♦ Dec. 16 at 7:30: The poets Sarah Manguso and Russell Edson read from their work. (Russian Samovar, 256 W. 52nd St. Tickets at the door.)

**TALKS**
Dec. 11 at 7:30: The composer Ned Rorem celebrates his eightieth birthday, with the help of Renaud Machart, music critic for *Le Monde*, and Tom Bishop, of the Center for French Civilization and Culture at New York University. (La Maison Française, New York University, 16 Washington Mews. For more information, call 212-998-8750.) ♦ Dec. 15 at 6:30: The Shakespeare Society pays tribute to the noted director Sir Peter Hall. The actress Vanessa Redgrave, the playwright John Guare, and others from the theatre world will do the honors. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. For more information, call 212-327-2253.)



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## MOVIES OPENING

**AKA**
Duncan Roy wrote and directed this drama in which the screen is divided into three panels, providing simultaneous perspectives on the story of a young British man who fakes his way into high society. Opening Dec. 12. (Cinema Village.)

**BIG FISH**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 10.

**GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 12. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

**LOVE DON'T COST A THING**
A remake of the 1987 film "Can't Buy Me Love," in which a nerdy high-school senior (Nick Cannon) pays a popular cheerleader (Christina Milian) to be his girlfriend. Directed by Troy Beyer. Opening Dec. 12.

**POWER TRIP**
A documentary portrait of Georgia, the former Soviet republic, that centers on the efforts of an American-owned electric company to collect payments from its recalcitrant customers. Paul Devlin directed. In English and Georgian. Opening Dec. 10. (Film Forum.)

**SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE**
Nancy Meyers wrote and directed this romantic comedy with Jack Nicholson as a playboy who falls for the mother (Diane Keaton) of his latest girlfriend (Amanda Peet). Also with Frances McDormand and Keanu Reeves. Opening Dec. 12.

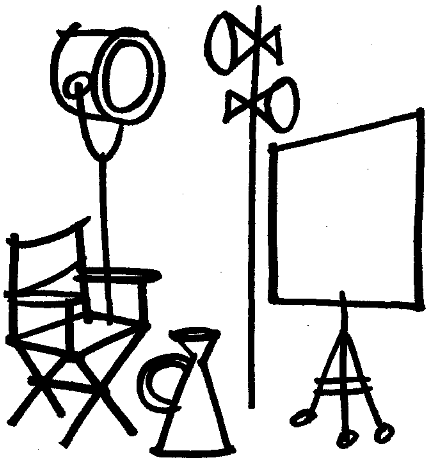
**THE STATEMENT**
A drama about a French man (Michael Caine) who collaborated with the Nazis and has been in hiding for forty years. Tilda Swinton plays the judge who launches a new investigation into his crimes. Directed by Norman Jewison. Opening Dec. 12. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

**STUCK ON YOU**
A comedy from the Farrelly brothers, in which Matt Damon and Greg Kinnear play two fractious brothers who are literally joined at the hip. Also with Eva Mendes, Seymour Cassel, and Cher. Opening Dec. 12.

## FILM NOTES

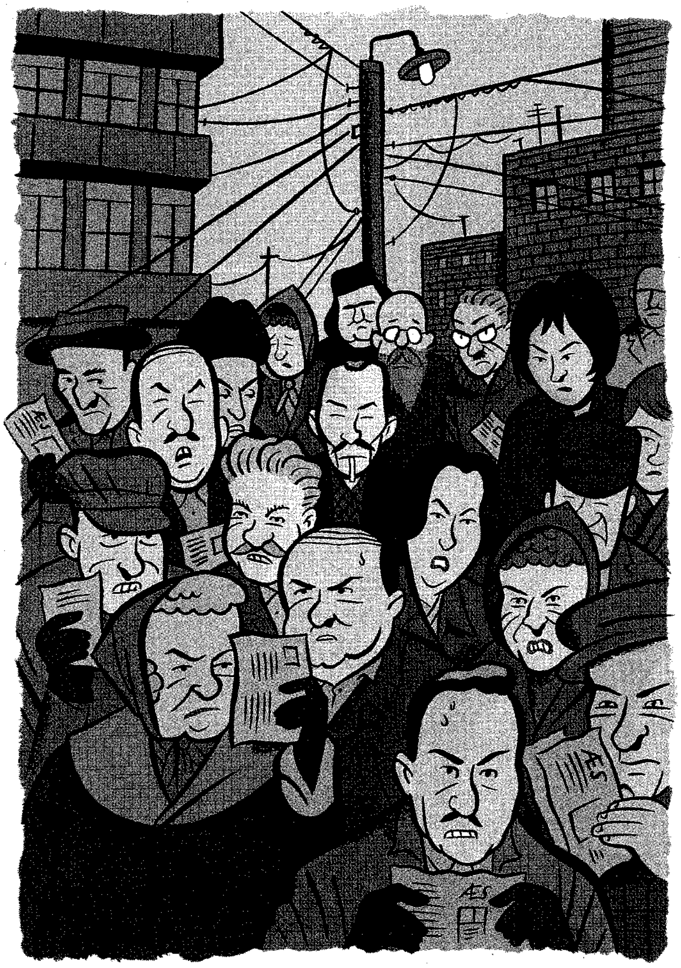
**BAD SANTA**
There's something appealing about a dyspeptic comedy with an alcoholic Santa Claus (Billy Bob Thornton), a foulmouthed elf (Tony Cox), and a script that sends up the faux togetherness of the holidays, but this movie is more scatological than subversive. Terry Zwigoff, who directed "Crumb" and "Ghost World," has a knack for finding the grotesque in modern America, and he has a terrific child actor in Brett Kelly, a butterball whose unbreakable belief in the spirit of Christmas carries the film. Yet, once the rude shock of a profane Claus wears off, there's not really much to do except await the next outrageous remark.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

**THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS**
Rémy (Rémy Girard), the plumply boisterous philanderer of Denys Arcand's 1986 film, "The Decline of the American Empire," is now in his early fifties and dying of cancer in a Quebec hospital. His investment-banker son, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)—a svelte, devastatingly efficient young man who disapproves of his reprobate father—shows up from London, arranges for Rémy's comfort as best he can, and reassembles the gang of gabby intellectuals who were Rémy's friends and colleagues in the earlier movie. The hospital room becomes the site of an ongoing party: sexual memories, bawdy jokes, political tirades, and regrets bang off the walls at all hours. Eventually, the entire group relocates to a house on the same lake that was the setting for "Decline"; as Rémy grapples with his failures and satisfactions, the movie shuts up and calms down. Arcand's film might be called an idyll of death, and the concluding scenes, in which Rémy tries to pass something on to the next generation, are intensely moving. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/03.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)



**ELF**
Will Ferrell with training wheels. The rambunctious comedian gives a funny, half-throttle performance as Buddy, a human raised by the elves at the North Pole. This good-spirited holiday comedy was directed by Jon Favreau, with nary a wannabe mobster or a swinger in sight. Even when Buddy comes to New York City, the movie is happy and chipper, with plenty of homages to Christmas movies past. The best scenes are a montage with Ferrell elfing around on the city streets, and his showdown with Peter Dinklage, in at least his third role as a touchy dwarf.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

**HIGH AND LOW**
Akira Kurosawa's 1963 *policier* transcends its genre and premise and becomes an Olympian urban action movie. A principled shoe executive (Toshiro Mifune) is about to use his borrowings and savings to take over the business when he's told that his son has been kidnapped. The real victim turns out to be his chauffeur's son, but Mifune pays the ransom anyway, knowing that competing executives will force him out of the company. From the opening arguments over shoes—Mifune wants to make them sturdy, his peers want to make them cheap—Kurosawa imbues this picture with a fiery disdain for moral shoddiness. The first section is largely confined to Mifune's hilltop house, but Kurosawa charges every corner of it with tension, as Mifune's associates and the police crowd in on him and the kidnappers use binoculars to spy on his actions. In the second section, the director slashes through the claustrophobia with great horizontal strokes as the police inspector (the dynamic young Tatsuya Nakadai) helps Mifune deliver the ransom on the bullet train and then commands his task force on a headlong manhunt. In the third and most impressionistic section, the kidnapper leads the cops on a harrowing tour of dope-riddled after-hours Japan. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (Thalia Theatre; Dec. 13-14.)



*"Power Trip," a documentary about Georgia, opens December 10.*

SETH

**THE HUMAN STAIN**
Robert Benton, the maker of such muted films as "Nobody's Fool," has now turned his attention to the somewhat louder material of Philip Roth, whose infuriated tale of love in the age of Kenneth Starr was published in 2000. Anthony Hopkins is Coleman Silk, born black, but pale of skin, who, with smarting irony, is hounded from his post as a professor of classics for an allegedly racist remark. His lover, who sweeps floors and milks cows for a living, is played by Nicole Kidman, whose bearing, unfortunately for Benton, becomes more aristocratic with every passing film. The miscasting is completed by Gary Sinise, who takes the part of Nathan Zuckerman, one of Roth's roster of stand-ins. The result is calm, wintry, and plaintive—in other words, a world away from the novel. That is no crime, but Benton's decorous approach leaves the movie floundering in implausibilities. With Wentworth Miller as the younger (and more compelling) Silk.—*Anthony Lane* (11/3/03) (Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

**IN AMERICA**
The tale of an Irish family that travels to New York in search of a better life, or, at any rate, a life. Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger), settle near Hell's Kitchen and wrestle, as you would expect, with outlandish local customs such as air-conditioners and Halloween. Despite the title, the director, Jim Sheridan, is gripped less by the country in which his characters find them-

selves than by their own hope and anguish: there was a third child, a boy, who died before they came to the States. The movie has a busy intensity but lacks the rooted confidence of Sheridan's Irish work, as seen in "My Left Foot" and "In the Name of the Father." What ties it down, if anything, is the performance of Sarah Bolger—ten years old when the picture was made, but the sanest and saddest person on the block.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (Beekman, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

**JACK**

A great director at his nadir. It may be that Francis Ford Coppola simply shot the saccharine script by James DeMonaco and Gary Nadeau—a melding of boy-in-a-man's-body movies like "Big" with misunderstood-genius films like "Phenomenon." Or perhaps their story of a ten-year-old with a forty-year-old physique venturing beyond the home for the first time triggered Coppola's own memories of the year he spent housebound with polio when he was ten. In any case, unless you naturally crack up and then well up at the sight of an aging hairball (Robin Williams) looking at the world through a babe's eyes, you'll resist this 1996 film's lowbrow humor and crocodile tears. Normally skilled, intuitive performers like Diane Lane (who plays Jack's overprotective yet playful mom) can't find any creative traction as Jack teaches everyone to savor life. With Jennifer Lopez as Jack's fifth-grade teacher, Fran Drescher as a kindly temptress, and Bill Cosby as Jack's gruff, loving, cliché-spewing tutor.—*M.S.* (Moving Image; Dec. 13.)

**THE LAST SAMURAI**

Tom Cruise is Nathan Algren, a disillusioned Civil War hero, who goes to Japan in 1876 and trains the Emperor's army in modern warfare. In their first encounter with the great samurai Lord Katsumoto (Ken Watanabe), the gun-toting soldiers are overwhelmed and Algren is carted off to Katsumoto's mountain retreat, where the two warriors have dignified conversations about loyalty and cherry blossoms and other profound Japanese things. Redeemed by discipline and honor, Algren trains as a samurai and, in the end, fights alongside the great man. The director, Edward Zwick, attempting to revive the stately manner of sixties epics, has made a very earnest piece of work—handsome, methodical, pious, and rather doggedly literal. The training sequences are fun (Cruise gets knocked on his ass again and again), and the big battles are thrilling. Yet the naïve association of virtue with feudalism and the scene of Algren kneeling before the Emperor induce a certain amount of queasiness. With the beautiful exmodel Koyuki as Taka, the widow who takes care of Algren. From a story by John Logan, who worked with Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz on the stiff-jointed screenplay.—*D.D.* (12/8/03) (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

**MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD**

Finally, the work of Patrick O'Brian arrives onscreen. Two of his twenty Jack Aubrey novels have been requisitioned for this new Peter Weir film; instead of receiving a gentle introduction, we are launched straight into a fogbound firefight, and from there into a race around Cape Horn. The casting of Russell Crowe as Aubrey will divide the fans; he can handle the sway of action with aplomb, but O'Brian readers may flinch at his sullen air and pine for the bluffness of the original. Paul Bettany does a delicate job with the role of Stephen Maturin, Jack's best and cleverest friend; we sense his quiet eagerness—common to the work of Weir and O'Brian—to press on toward the darker reaches of the world and discover more. For all the foul weather, and despite the charming amputation scene, we feel ourselves to be in good company with these men, and strangely jealous of their packed and salted lives.—*A.L.* (11/17/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

**THE MISSING**

Ron Howard gets down and dirty with a skillfully directed but rather sadistic Western about a vicious Apache *brujo* (Eric Schweig), or witch, who hangs rattlers in the trees, throws vile colored powders into people's mouths and eyes, and captures young white virgins whom he then sells as slaves to laughing Mexicans. No such trade existed in New Mexico in 1885, but Howard deals in such authentic trials as bullets removed from flesh and teeth pulling. Cate Blanchett is the tough frontier woman whose daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) is kidnapped by the Apaches, and Tommy Lee Jones plays Blanchett's muttering reprobate of a father, who long ago "went Injun" and understands their savage ways. The movie might be seen as a degraded version of the 1956 John Ford classic, "The Searchers."—*D.D.* (12/8/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

**MY ARCHITECT**

A traditional quest, superbly told. Nathaniel Kahn seeks to understand the life of his father, the architect Louis I. Kahn; his task is made even more difficult by the fact that Kahn had three separate and coexisting families: a wife and two mistresses with one child apiece. For his part, Nathaniel was an illegitimate son and only eleven when his father died; his interviews are laced with raw, uncut feeling for a man he never really knew. Throughout the documentary, he uses Kahn's buildings (beautifully photographed) as a kind of wedge into his father's motivations and personality. He discovers that Kahn's more famous contemporaries, like I. M. Pei, appear haunted by his career: is it better to have designed three or four unexampled buildings, as Kahn did, or to have had a successful, high-profile architectural practice? Perhaps more

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**Cat On A Hot Tin Roof**
Ashley Judd, Jason Patric and Ned Beatty come to Broadway in a new production of this classic Pulitzer Prize–winning drama, considered one of Tennessee Williams' finest works. Limited 18-week engagement, directed by Anthony Page. Hurry to get some of the best seats in the house!

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surprising, the women in Kahn's life don't regret the way he treated them. Anne Tyng, Kahn's co-worker and mistress, explains her affection this way: "The ideas that you work on together connect you always somehow." In the end, Nathaniel's homage to his father demonstrates what it was like to be caught in his creative whirlwind.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

**MYSTIC RIVER**

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later, he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neighborhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.)

**PIECES OF APRIL**

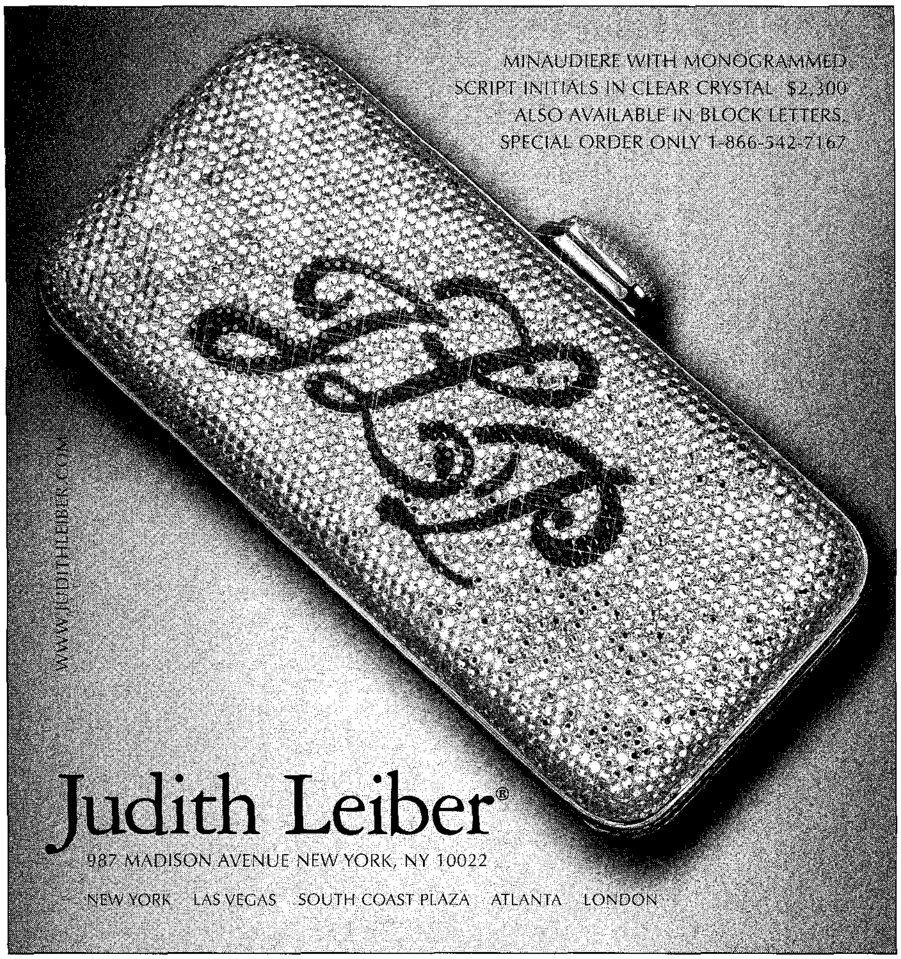
Katie Holmes continues to distance herself from her "Dawson's Creek" past, in this sensitive drama written and directed by Peter Hedges. The apple-cheeked actress surrounds her eyes with black liner and slumps her shoulders as April, a rebellious daughter living a shabby-chic life on the Lower East Side. Her transformation works, for the most part, but the movie's real center of gravity is Patricia Clarkson, as April's mother, who is suffering from breast cancer. It's a challenging role; Hedges wrote the character as someone who can no longer tolerate sympathy, and Clarkson manages to express vulnerability along with the dry, caustic wit of a woman who has made her reckoning with death. The movie has April reuniting with her mother for Thanksgiving, but it's not a depressing or cheaply sentimental story. With Oliver Platt, Alison Pill, Alice Drummond, and Derek Luke lending fine support as family and boyfriend.—*M.A.* (84th Street Sixplex and Sunshine Cinema.)

**SHANGHAI EXPRESS**

Irresistibly enjoyable. Marlene Dietrich gets to deliver what is perhaps her most memorable line: "It took more than one man to change my name to Shanghai Lily." In this glossy 1932 mixture of sex and intrigue, Shanghai Lily and her exquisitely stoic beloved (Clive Brook) fall into the hands of sinister Chinese revolutionaries led by Warner Oland. (He gets to deliver a camp classic—"The white woman stays with me.") When this Oriental chieftain questions Lily about why she's going to Shanghai, she answers: "To buy a new hat." The scriptwriter, Jules Furthman, must have had a special affection for that line, because in 1944 he gave it to Lauren Bacall in her début film, "To Have and Have Not." Directed by Josef von Sternberg, this movie has style—a triumphant fusion of sin, glamour, shamelessness, art, and, perhaps, a furtive sense of humor.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Dec. 12-13.)

**THE STATION AGENT**

The writer and director Tom McCarthy has turned his attention to a New Jersey backwater and come up with something lyrical, taciturn, and stripped of sentimentality. Peter Dinklage plays Fin, a dwarf who inherits a cabinlike home beside a railroad track in Newfoundland, in Morris County. Fin loves trains and not much else—hardly surprising,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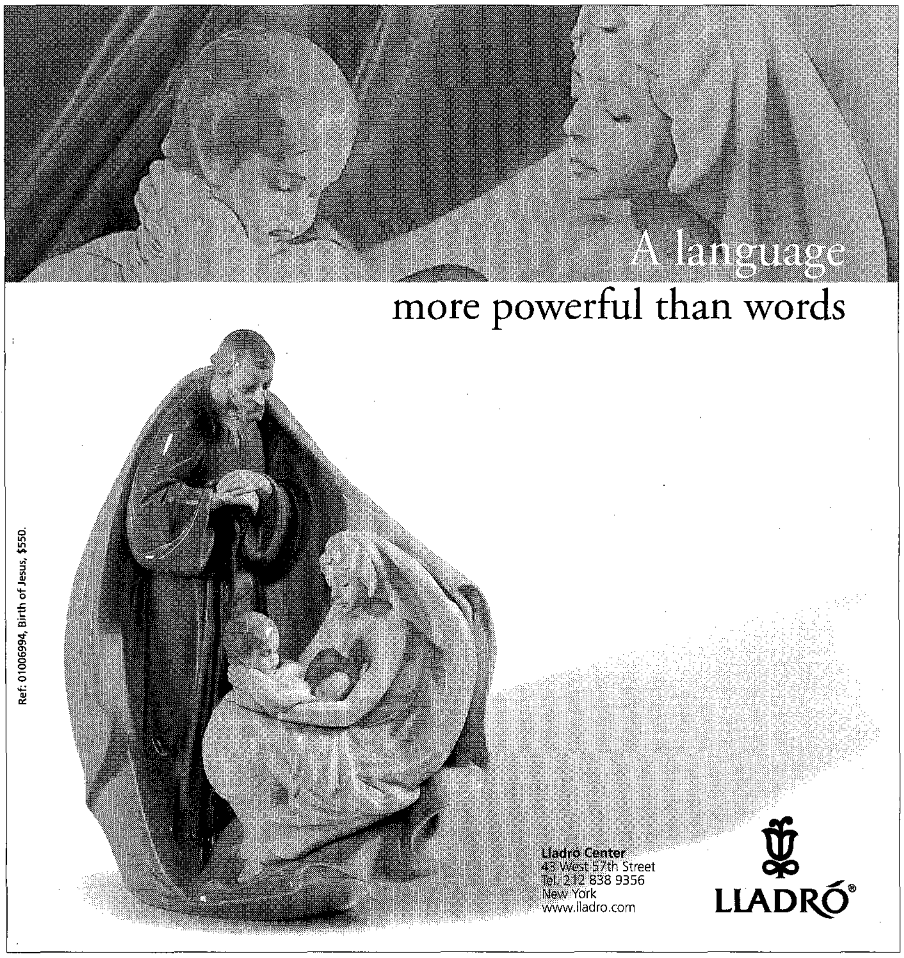

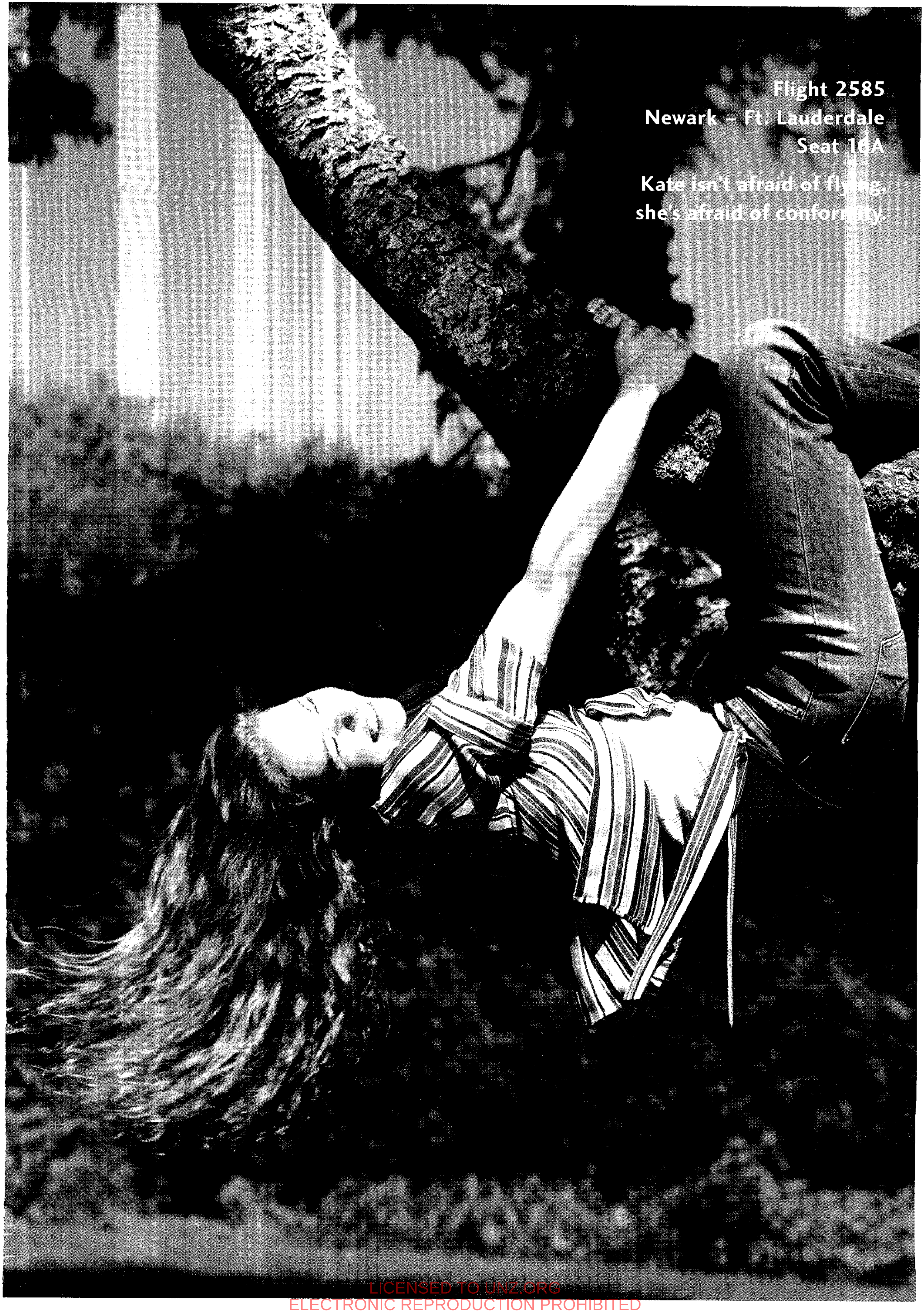
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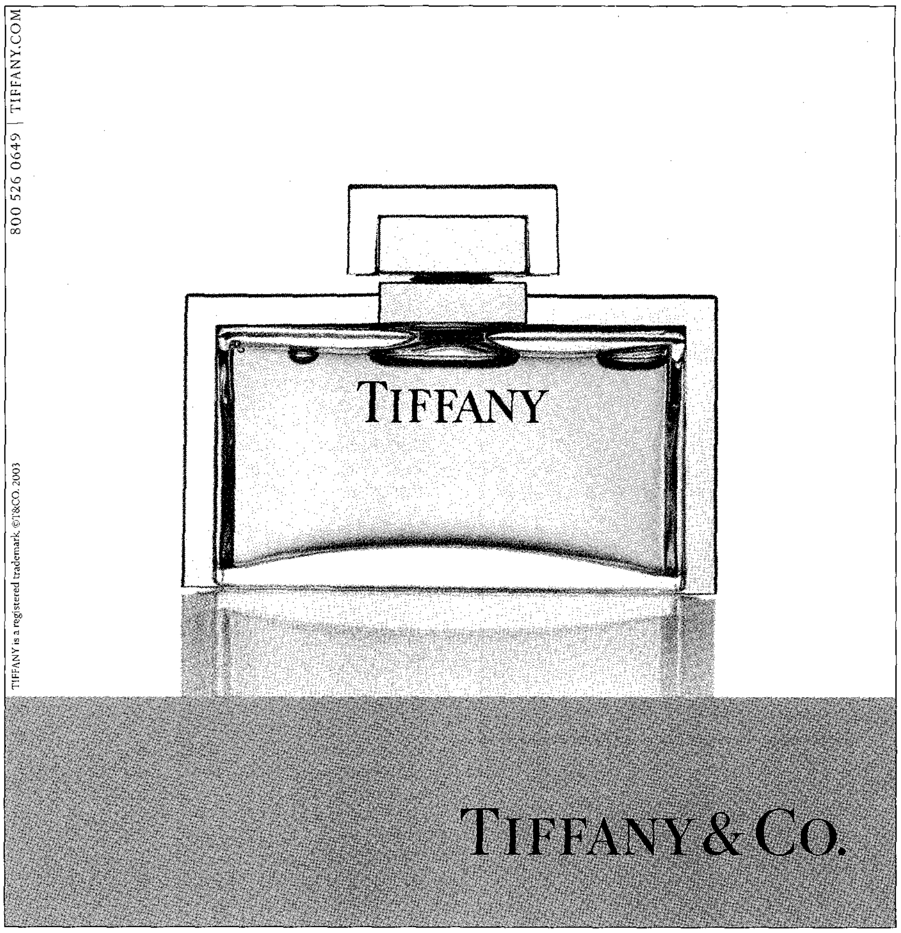
given that the world has shown him little more than a laugh and a sneer—and he is none too thrilled when his quiet space is invaded. Over time, though, he warms to the invaders: Joe (Bobby Cannavale), loud and lonely, who sells coffee and hot dogs from a neighboring van, and Olivia (Patricia Clarkson), a painter, still mourning the loss of a young son. The three of them fall in with one another, then fall out, then gradually fall back in; like some of the best short stories, the picture evades grandeur, mature enough to linger on what nearly happens. None of the central performers put a foot wrong, and McCarthy takes care not to insist that small is beautiful; rather, he and Dinklage leave us reflecting that small can be angry, tired, and tough.—*A.L.* (10/6/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sutton 1 and 2.)

**THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**
A boy is given a bicycle. He grows up to compete, under the tutelage of his ferocious grandmother, in the Tour de France, only to be kidnapped and smuggled overseas. The old lady, with a panting hound in tow, tracks and retrieves the unfortunate cyclist, aided by three crones who feast on a casserole of murdered frogs. Such is the gritty, fantastic plot of Sylvain Chomet's animated film, which could only have emerged from a culture in which the worship of comic books approaches the status of an organized religion. Indeed, there is much to revere in Chomet's swollen caricatures and vertiginous angles, although agnostics may be tempted to point out that a little elastic surrealism goes a long way, and that to learn the exact details of somebody else's dreams—which is what this movie feels like—can be at once haunting and tiresome. In French, just about, though most of it is noise, and no subtitles are required.—*A.L.* (12/1/03) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

**21 GRAMS**
Impassioned and affecting as some of it is, this desperately sincere drama of life and death in Nowheresville, U.S.A., is also an arrogant failure. Benicio Del Toro, dolorously made up with clown circles under his eyes, plays the Jesus-freak ex-con who accidentally runs down a man and his two little girls. Sean Penn, some sort of math professor with a bad ticker, gets the heart of the dead man, at which point he begins to follow around the grieving widow (Naomi Watts). Written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, the same team responsible for the powerful "Amores Perros," the picture moves every which way but straight ahead. The intent of the scrambled syntax, one imagines, is to show how three sensitive and damaged people might encroach upon one another's lives, even infiltrate one another's unconscious, a process that works independently of time. But we don't know where we are in the story or why a given action should matter. The jagged pieces of the mosaic keep dropping off the wall and falling to the floor with a clatter. Yet the three stars act the hell out of their tormented roles, and, at times, they are amazing to watch.—*D.D.* (11/24/03) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

## ALSO PLAYING

**THE COOLER**
Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.
**LOST IN TRANSLATION** (9/15/03)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
**MONSIEUR IBRAHIM**
Sunshine Cinema.
**SHATTERED GLASS** (11/3/03)
Angelika Film Center and Paris.
**SYLVIA** (10/20/03)
Village East Cinemas.
**TO BE AND TO HAVE** (9/29/03)
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.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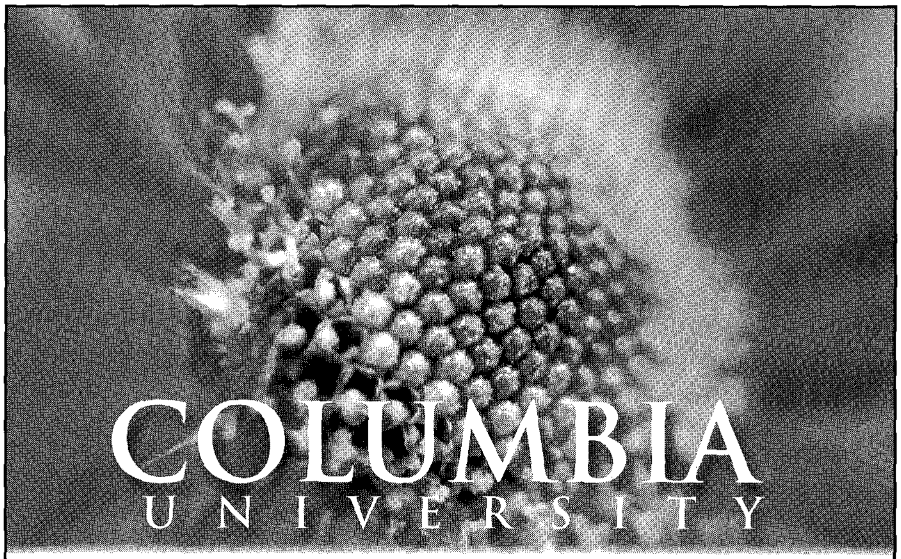

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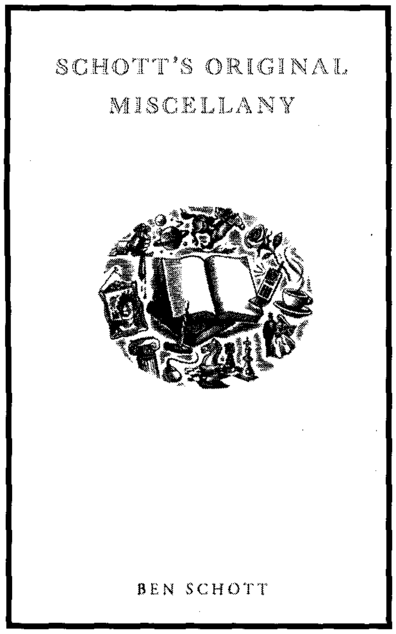
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AULD LANG SYNE

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to min'?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne?

*For auld lang syne, my dear,*
*For auld lang syne.*
*We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,*
*For auld lang syne.*

We twa hae run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wandered mony a weary foot
Sin' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidled i' the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roared
Sin auld lang syne.

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine;
And we'll tak a right guide-willie waught,
For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp,
And surely I'll be mine!
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

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## THEATRE ADDRESSES

*Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.*

**Angelika Film Center,** 18 W. Houston St.
**Astor Plaza,** 44th St. at Broadway.
**Battery Park 16,** West St. at Vesey St.
**Beekman,** Second Ave. at 66th St.
**Chelsea Cinemas,** 260 W. 23rd St.
**Chelsea West,** 333 W. 23rd St.
**Cinemas 1, 2, and 3,** Third Ave. at 60th St.
**Cinema Village,** 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
**East 86th Street Cinemas,** Third Ave. at 86th St.
**84th Street Sixplex,** Broadway at 84th St.
**Empire 25,** on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
**59th Street East Cinema,** 239 E. 59th St.
**First & 62nd Cinemas,** 400 E. 62nd St.
**42nd Street E Walk,** 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
**Kips Bay Theatre,** Second Ave. at 32nd St.
**Lincoln Plaza Cinemas,** Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
**Lincoln Square,** Broadway at 68th St.
**New York Twin,** Second Ave. at 66th St.
**19th Street East 6,** Broadway at 19th St.
**Orpheum VII,** Third Ave. at 86th St.
**Paris,** 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
**Quad Cinema,** 34 W. 13th St.
**72nd Street East,** Third Ave. at 71st St.
**64th and 2nd,** Second Ave. at 64th St.
**62nd & Broadway,** 62 W. 62nd St.
**Sunshine Cinema,** 139-143 E. Houston St.
**Sutton 1 and 2,** Third Ave. at 57th St.
**34th Street Theatre,** 312 W. 34th St.
**Union Square,** Broadway at 13th St.
**Village East Cinemas,** Second Ave. at 12th St.
**Village Theatre VII,** Third Ave. at 11th St.
**Ziegfeld,** 141 W. 54th St.

## REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE**
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special event. Dec. 10 at 7: "The Last Samurai" (†), followed by a discussion with the film's production designer, Lilly Kilvert. ♦ "Cinema Tropical." Dec. 12 at 7:30: "War Takes" (2002, Patricia Castano and Adelaida Trujillo; in Spanish). ♦ Through Dec. 14: A Francis Ford Coppola retrospective. Dec. 13 at 1: "The Godfather, Part III" (1990). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4:15: "Jack" (†). ♦ Dec. 13-14 at 6:30: "Apocalypse Now Redux" (2001). ♦ Dec. 14 at 1:30: "Bram Stoker's Dracula" (1992). ♦ Dec. 14 at 4: "The Rainmaker" (1997).

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Dec. 10 at 8:30: "The Cloud of Unknowing" (2003, Richard Sylvarnes). ♦ Dec. 11 at 9:30: "Melvin Goes to Dinner" (2002, Bob Odenkirk). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7: "Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors" (1965, Sergei Paradjanov; in Ukrainian). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Back and Forth" (1969, Michael Snow). ♦ Dec. 12 at 9:15: "Color of Pomegranates" (1969, Paradjanov; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 13-14: The 2003 New York Expo Film Festival, independent short films and videos.

**BAM ROSE CINEMAS**
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—A retrospective of the Russian director Boris Barnet. All films are in Russian. Dec. 10 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "By the Bluest of Seas" (1936). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Alenka" (1961). ♦ Dec. 15 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Bountiful Summer" (1951). ♦ Dec. 16 at 7:30: "The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks" (1924, Lev Kuleshov; with Barnet as an actor). ♦ Bollywood movies. All films are in Hindi. Dec. 12 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Tale of a Naughty Girl" (2002, Buddhadev Dasgupta). ♦ Dec. 13 at 2 and 7: "Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Ghum" (2001, Karen Johar). ♦ Dec. 14 at 3 and 7: "Koi . . . Mil Gaya" (2002, Rakesh Roshan).

**FILM FORUM**
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Dec. 10-11 at 1:30, 4, 6:30, and 9: "From Here to Eternity" (1953, Fred Zinnemann). ♦ Starting Dec. 12: A Josef von Sternberg retrospective. Dec. 12-13 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Shanghai Express" (†). ♦ Dec. 14 at 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9: "The Devil Is a Woman" (1935). ♦ Dec. 15 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Thunderbolt" (1929). ♦ Dec. 15 at 3:40 and 7:15: "Underworld" (1927). ♦ Dec. 16 at 1:20, 5:20, and 9:20: "Anahatan" (1952). ♦ Dec. 16 at 3:10 and 7:10: "Jet Pilot" (1957).

**FLORENCE GOULD HALL**
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 23: "Petits Bijoux," underappreciated French films. Dec. 16 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Fear Over the City" (1975, Henri Verneuil; in French).

**GRAMERCY THEATRE**
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Feb. 27: "The Hidden God: Film and Faith." Dec. 11 at 2: "Crimes and Misdemeanors" (1989, Woody Allen). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4: "The Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ Starting Dec. 11: "Documentary Fortnight 2003," recent nonfiction films, many of which will be introduced by the directors. Dec. 11 at 6:15: "The Archive of Memory" (2003, Eric Breitbart), "Wonderful Atrocities" (2002, Renato Martins; in Portuguese), and "50 Ways to Set a Table" (2003, Judy Fiskin). ♦ Dec. 11 at 8:30: "Yank Tanks" (2002, David Schendel; in Spanish). ♦ Dec. 12 at 2: "Howrah Station—Calcutta" (2002, Harrie Timmermans) and "Manjuben Truck Driver" (2002, Sherna Dastur; in Hindi and Gujarati). ♦ Dec. 12 at 4: "Fleurette" (2002, Sergio Trefaut; in Portuguese). ♦ Dec. 12 at 6: "Rice Girls" (2003, Matteo Bellizzi; in Italian). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Jesus, You Know" (2003, Ulrich Seidl; in German). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1: "Mountain Men and Holy Wars" (2003, Taran Davies). ♦ Dec. 13 at 3: "Baghdad in No Particular Order" (2003, Paul Chan). ♦ Dec. 13 at 5: "Third World Newsreel: A New Production and Selected Shorts North Korea" (2003, J. T. Takagi and Hye-Jung Park; in Korean and English). ♦ Dec. 13 at 7: "Dog Days" (Seidl; in German). ♦ Dec. 13 at 9:15: "Animal Love" (1995, Seidl; in German). ♦ Dec. 14 at 2: "Portrait" (2002, Sergey Lozniksa) and "Obec B" (2002, Filip Remunda; in Czech). ♦ Dec. 14 at 4: "The Trees Grow Too in Kabylia" (2002, Djamila Sahraoui; in Arabic). ♦ Dec. 14 at 6: "Return to Tibet" (1993-2003, Nicholas Vreeland). ♦ Dec. 15 at 6: "Porraimos" (2002, Alexandra Isles).

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Through Jan. 14: A Federico Fellini retrospective. All films are in Italian. Dec. 10 at 7: "I Clowns" (1970). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7: "Roma" (1972). ♦ Dec. 13 at 3: "Fellini: A Director's Notebook" (1969). ♦ Dec. 13 at 7: "Amarcord" (1973).

**SUNSHINE CINEMA**
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Dec. 12-13: "Versus" (2000, Ryuhei Kitamura; in English and Japanese).

**THALIA THEATRE**
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—An Akira Kurosawa retrospective. All films are in Japanese. Dec. 13-14 at 5: "High and Low" (†). ♦ Dec. 13 at 8:15 and Dec. 14 at 1 and 8:15: "Red Beard" (1965).

**WALTER READE THEATRE**
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Dec. 24: "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 10 at 1: "Frivolinas" (1927, Arturo Carballo). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3:15, Dec. 13 at 3:45, and Dec. 14 at 9:15: "Life Leaves Marks" (2003, Enrique Urbizu). ♦ Dec. 11 at 1: "Where Is Madame Catherine?" (2003, Marc Recha). ♦ Dec. 11 at 3:15, Dec. 13 at 8:15, and Dec. 15 at 1:30 and 6:15: "Soldiers of Salamina" (2003, David Trueba). ♦ Dec. 12 at 1 and 5 and Dec. 14 at 7:10: "Bulgarian Lovers" (2002, Eloy de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 12 at 3:10 and 7:10 and Dec. 14 at 3: "A Beautiful Sunset" (2003, Alvaro del Amo). ♦ Dec. 12 at 9:15, Dec. 13 at 1:30, and Dec. 14 at 5: Spanish short films. ♦ Dec. 13 at 6 and Dec. 15 at 4 and 8:45: "November" (2003, Achero Mañas). ♦ Dec. 14 at 1: Short films made during the Spanish Civil War. ♦ Dec. 16 at 1: "Nobody's Life" (2002, Eduard Cortés). ♦ Dec. 16 at 3:15: "Carlos Against the World" (2002, Chiqui Carabante).

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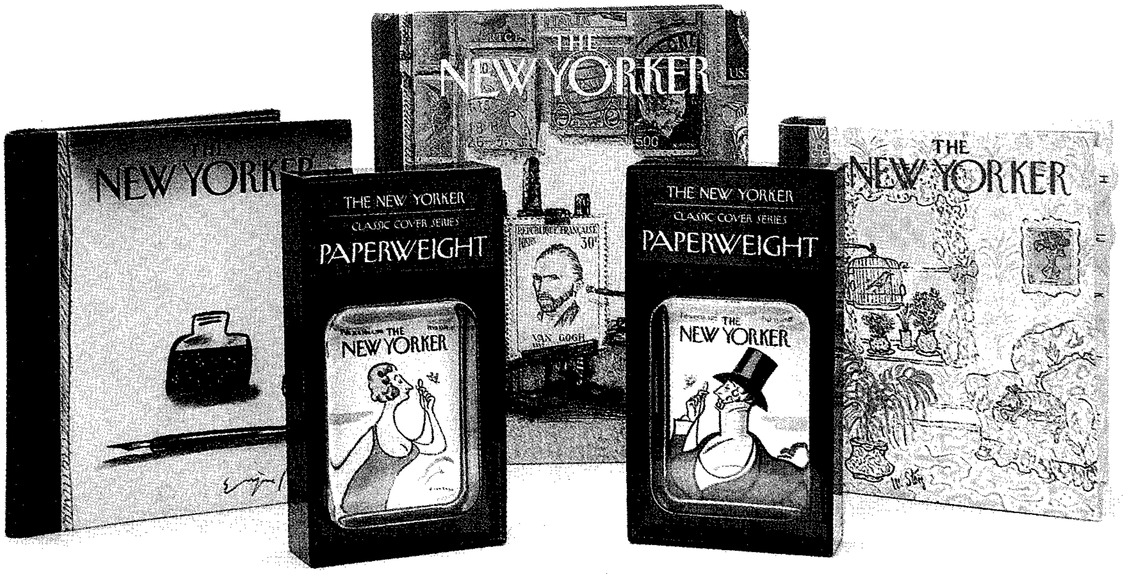
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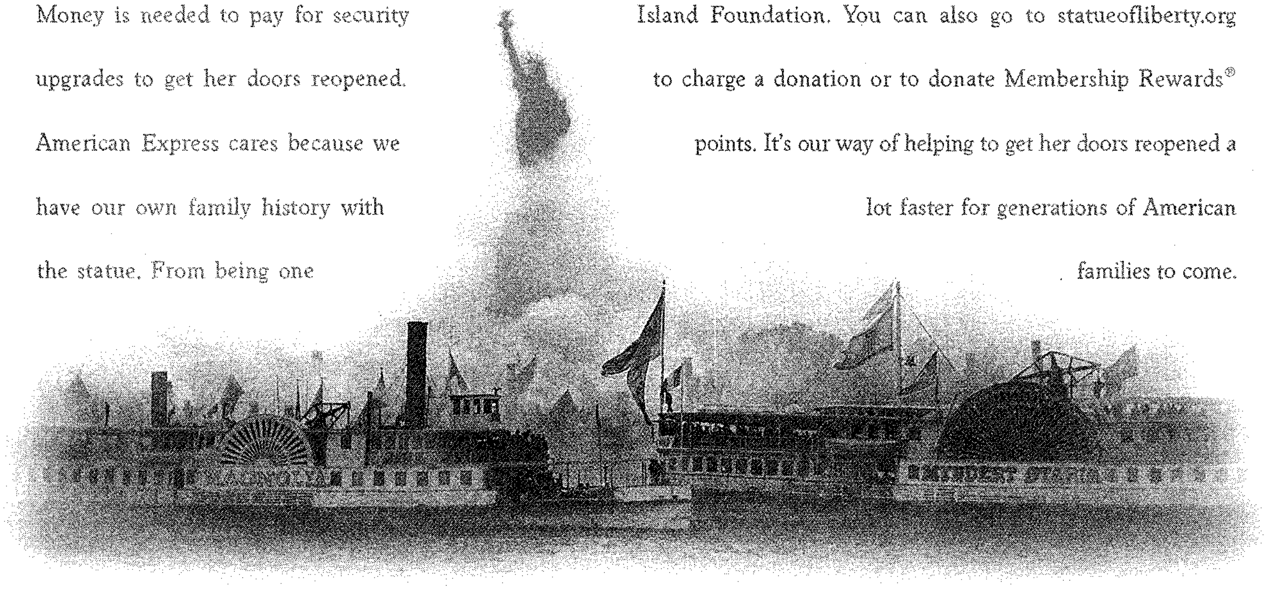

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THE NEW YORKER

# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

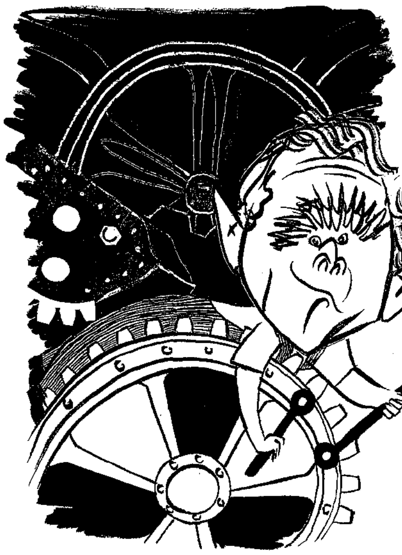
## COMMENT
## HAPPY DAYS

Things are looking up—according to George W. Bush and the *Times*, anyway. Last Tuesday, the paper led its front page with this sunny triple-decker: "MANUFACTURING AT HIGHEST LEVEL IN TWO DECADES; HIRING OUTLOOK IS UPBEAT; STOCKS AT 18-MONTH PEAK ON RUN OF POSITIVE DATA—BUSH OPTIMISTIC." The headline's main claim, however, was inaccurate. It misinterpreted an economic indicator that is designed to gauge whether factories are churning out more or less stuff than they did last month, not absolute levels of production. The most reliable measure of how manufacturing is doing is the Federal Reserve's index of industrial production, which in October was 112.7, compared with a high of 118.4 in June of 2000. The November figure comes out next week. A six-point jump isn't impossible, but it would be virtually unprecedented.

What we can be sure of is that most manufacturing companies are still operating well below capacity, and that millions of manufacturing jobs have been lost. In October, 73.5 per cent of plants and equipment were in active use. Three years ago, more than eighty per cent were. When President Bush took office, about 17.1 million Americans worked in factories; today, 14.5 million do. Last month, another seventeen thousand manufacturing jobs disappeared. Manufacturing employment has now fallen for forty straight months.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Over all, the economy is rebounding from three years of stagnation, but the fate of manufacturing can't be dismissed, especially since we're entering an election year. Although manufacturing now accounts for only about a seventh of G.D.P., it remains the sector most attuned to the economic cycle; it is an irreplaceable source of innovation and exports; and it has great symbolic importance. Many more of us spend our day shuffling papers and hitting keyboards than actually making things, but we still like to think of the United States as the workshop of the world. (Moreover, many people who do make things happen to live in swing states.)



The President, understandably, doesn't linger on the facts that Toyota recently overtook Ford as the world's second-largest car company and that Levi Strauss is closing its remaining American plants. "Our economy was strong and it is getting stronger," Bush declared last week. "Productivity is high; business investment is strong; housing construction is strong. The tax relief we passed is working." That is all true, even though the economy created far fewer jobs in November than had been expected. But the lesson of this resurgence is not one that Republicans usually like to celebrate: together with Alan Greenspan and his colleagues at the Fed, the Bush Administration has demonstrated that an activist economic policy can revive even the most moribund of economies, at least for a while.

Just a few months ago, some experts feared that the United States might be heading for a Japanese-style slump, in which poor economic growth persisted for a decade or more. To head off this possibility, the Fed kept interest rates at historic lows, and the White House trumpeted its third set of tax cuts in two years, while quietly signing off on a big increase in federal spending. Such a combination of expansionary monetary and fiscal policy is the standard cure for recessions, and has been since Keynes.

Millions of homeowners took advantage of cheap money to refinance their mortgages, which meant that they had more cash to spend on S.U.V.s, outdoor grills, and summer vacations. Meanwhile, government agencies, and not just the Department of Defense, spent more, too. Between 2001 and 2003, total federal expenditures increased by almost three hundred billion dollars, or sixteen per cent, prompting howls of outrage from places like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. "It's a far cry from the less-government, 'leave us alone' conservatism of Ronald Reagan," Cato's David Boaz recently lamented in the Washington *Post*.

Then there were the tax cuts. Although many commentators focussed on the giveaways to the rich inherent in reducing the taxes payable on dividends and capital gains, these changes had little immediate impact on spending patterns. It was the income-tax rebates for families with children which gave the economy a boost when it was most needed. And, while the resultant growth spurt may have been, in part, a "sugar high," it won't drop right away. Economies are like hot-air balloons: the hard part is raising them aloft. Once they get there, they can move on their own steam for some time. Although the third-quarter growth rate of more than eight per cent can't be maintained, the economy will probably still be looking fairly lively as next November approaches.

This is reassuring news for Republicans, but it isn't necessarily good for the country. We are living through the early stages of an old-fashioned "political business cycle," in which the post-election stage is likely to be much less fun. Once the votes are counted, whoever is residing in the White House will have to deal with record-breaking budget deficits and trade deficits, both of which are symptomatic of a nation living well beyond its means. In only three years, the federal government has gone from a surplus of two hundred and thirty-six billion dollars to a deficit of three hundred and seventy-four billion dollars. Most independent experts see big deficits stretching to 2010, or beyond. The economic slowdown that began in 2001 was partly responsible for this fiscal calamity, but the chief culprit was Republican profligacy. Tax cuts and higher spending have set the country's finances on an unsustainable course.

The trade deficit, which has received less public attention, also represents a major threat to the economy. It now exceeds five per cent of G.D.P. Other countries that have run up trade deficits of this magnitude have eventually lost their creditors' confidence, and faced a currency crisis, higher interest rates, and a sharp recession. Of course, the President won't mention that the United States could follow the path of Brazil, Argentina, and Indonesia in his next stump speech. After all, the Dow is once again on the verge of ten thousand, Wall Street traders are getting ready to pocket their heftiest bonuses in years, and Google is planning the biggest Internet I.P.O. yet. Close your eyes and think of 1999.

—*John Cassidy*

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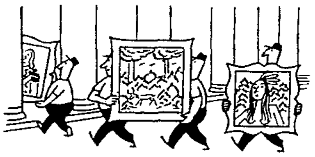
### SEASON'S GREETING

## BRUSH WITH POWER



Longtime recipients of the annual Prey family Christmas card—fellow-parishioners of the First Presbyterian Church in Oyster Bay, Long Island; summer residents in Tenant's Harbor, Maine; the United States Ambassador to the Czech Republic—may have noticed something familiar about this year's edition. The snowy woods, the red barn, the giant wreath: it's pretty, of course, but didn't the Preys send an image just like it a few years back? Well, yes, that's Barbara's "Season's Greetings" painting from 1998. Barbara should be forgiven, though, now that the news has finally come out—after eight months of enforced secrecy, extending even to her mother-in-law—that she had been hard at work this year on a more important project: the White House Christmas Card, which last week began arriving at the homes of a record million and a half Republican Party donors and foreign dignitaries, bearing a Crawford, Texas, postmark.

Barbara Ernst Prey keeps a low profile in the art world, and yet she may be, at this moment, the most widely viewed painter in the world. Her work hangs at American Embassies in Prague, Oslo, and Monrovia. (Minsk is on the waiting list.) NASA has a Prey, and another is coming. Libby Pataki recently requested Barbara's post-9/11 work "Gallantly Streaming," of an American flag against a cloudless sky.

"I don't really do interiors—I do landscapes," Prey, who is forty-six, and a mother of two, said the other day, shortly before flying to the capital for the Christmas card's official unveiling with the First Lady. "That's why this was such a challenge." She was giving a tour of her studio, on the third floor of the family's historic Queen Anne house in downtown Oyster Bay, and pointing out mockups of the card. It depicts the fireplace in the Diplomatic Reception Room, with festive decorations and a roaring blaze. (Last year's card, by the Chinese artist Zhen-Huan Lu, featured a Steinway in the White House's Grand Foyer, and was criticized for lacking holiday spirit.) One of her other card submissions (there were five), featuring the drapes in the Blue Room, was used for the invitations to various White House Christmas parties. Another, of a mirror in the State Dining Room, adorns the invitations to the Congressional Ball.

Prey works almost exclusively in watercolors (primary influences: Homer, Hopper). She says she likes to use strong colors, if possible, but speaks of her art mostly in terms of who collects it. The dominant wall motif in her studio is not paintings but testimonials. One framed note reads, "Thank you very much for the lovely poster and note cards. What a nice surprise! I'm thrilled to have the Kennebunkport painting to enjoy in the White House. I appreciate your kindness." It is signed by Laura Bush. (There are also letters from Barbara Bush.)

"The first person who bought one of my works was New York Governor Hugh Carey, back when I was seventeen," Prey said. Her mother, a professional artist and art teacher, was an acquaintance of Carey's. "I think it's still over his mantelpiece in Shelter Island."

"There are a couple of Nobel laureates who have my paintings," she went on. A letter from James Watson, the DNA pioneer, was on the wall by the staircase; he lives down the road. "And some senators," she continued, pointing out the letterhead of Judd Gregg (R., New Hampshire). She had just spent the weekend with Gregg and his wife in Washington, as a matter of fact.

"I look at my career as a building process," she said. "You're slowly building up your clientele, building up your collectors, building your résumé." She admit-

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ted that she had been pretty fortunate, too. In her twenties, she served briefly as a personal assistant to a Bavarian prince. "That was an exposure to prominent Europeans," she said. The prince now collects. In 1986, she went to Asia on a Henry Luce Foundation scholarship. "I did a painting of the Luce family house," she said. "And they used it as their Christmas card last year. And he's probably *the* patron of American art."

At one point, she was interrupted by a phone call from a White House press secretary. "It's pretty cool," she said after hanging up. "I've been so busy baking my pies for Thanksgiving that I haven't been able to appreciate it until now."

*—Ben McGrath*

### THE GOOD FIGHT
## WHEN EDIBLES ATTACK

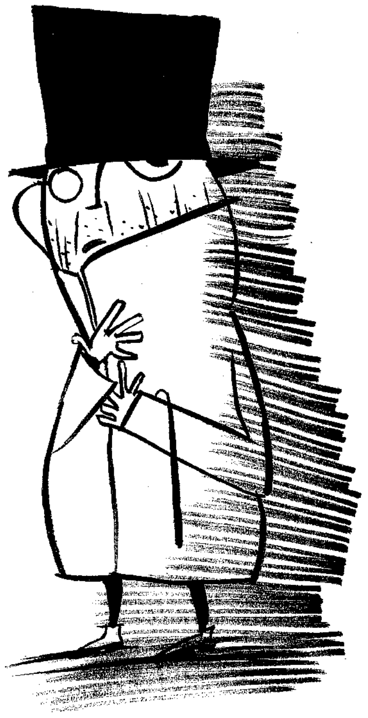
The guests at the Food Allergy Ball, a black-tie gala that took place at the Plaza Hotel last week, were drawn from that class of New York society which includes Fortune 500 C.E.O.s and senior partners at corporate law firms and exclusive interior decorators: the fortunate few who are largely sheltered from many of life's afflictions. But food allergies—the symptoms of which can range from mild nausea at a bite of shrimp to convulsions brought on by the mere inhalation of a cashew fragment—can strike even the most pampered New Yorkers, and, more significantly, the children of the most pampered New Yorkers, for whom a rogue peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich in the lunchroom can present a deadly threat. This fact helps explain why the Food Allergy Initiative, a nonprofit organization that was founded six years ago, has already raised a total of nine million dollars for research and education.

"If you're not going to do it for your kids, who are you going to do it for?" said Todd Slotkin, the Food Allergy Initiative's chairman and a senior executive at MacAndrews & Forbes Holdings. Slotkin's food-allergy activism was activated by the diagnosis of allergies in his twin sons as toddlers, after he unwittingly fed one of them a nut-laced cookie while on vacation in Nantucket. Slotkin suffers from the usual anxieties of parenthood—what are your kids doing, and who are they doing it with?—amplified to an excruciating degree. "My sons are eleven, and in a few years, I hear, they will start to kiss other people," he said as he tucked into a feast that began with a grilled-eggplant terrine (comprising twenty-one ingredients, all carefully enumerated on the menu), and explained that for his boys a make-out partner who had recently eaten a nut-studded brownie could prove fatal.

Sharyn Mann, the F.A.I.'s vice-chairman and the mistress of ceremonies, was motivated by similar concerns: her daughter, Tamara, suffers from severe food allergies. Mann wore a strapless black gown and a spray of black feathers in her upswept hair, in keeping with the black-and-white décor inspired by Cecil Beaton's set designs for "My Fair Lady." Mann had managed to enlist ten cast members of the show's London revival to fly over and perform, and friends of Mann testified that her maternal vigilance was as impressive as her event-production talents. "I was there the first time her daughter turned blue," said Wanda Dworman. "If she went anywhere, she couldn't eat anything outside of water or jello." Dworman described how her own consciousness about allergic reactions was raised during a trip to Aspen, where a bee flew behind her wraparound sunglasses and stung her twice; and she was pleased to report that there were at least some restaurateurs who took the issue seriously. "A lot of places have nuts in bread, but there are restaurants, like Le Cirque and Daniel, that are very sympathetic to this," she said.

The guests of honor were Joseph Flom, the senior partner of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom—and, according to Ronald Perelman, who introduced him, "my lawyer, my friend, and a member of my family"—and Flom's son Jason, the president of Lava Records. Jason Flom described how his aversion to nuts had caused him to make a hasty, gasping exit from the Chappaqua dinner table of former President Clinton not long ago, after it became clear that assurances from the wait staff that the meal was nut-free depended on what your definition of "nut" was. Other politicians have also failed to grasp the seriousness of the food-allergy issue. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who is a board member of F.A.I., said that he had written to Jimmy Carter after Carter sent a letter to the airlines in defense of packaged peanuts as an in-flight snack.

The main course was beef goulash with garlic-chive spaetzle. The Plaza kitchen, having striven so hard to create an allergy-proof menu, was momentarily flummoxed by requests for a vegetarian alternative; eventually someone rustled up a plate or two of steamed baby vegetables, the kind of thing children only pretend to be allergic to. The seven different desserts—created by the restaurants Danube and Bouley, whose chef, David Bouley, was honored with the Joe Baum Lifetime Achievement Award—were delivered to dimmed lights, a drumroll, and a rousing trumpet voluntary.



*Bad nut*

Bouley, on receiving his award, cited "the right to have a fine culinary experience without fear," and the evening's menu demonstrated the possibility of having a fine culinary experience without nuts—although some guests admitted quietly that a nut or two could be a good thing. Rita Blake, who owns a company that makes what she described as "very, very, very high-end window treatments," said that a few handfuls of nuts had served as her dinner the previous night. Blake was sympathetic to those with food allergies, having developed an intolerance to shellfish a few years ago, but nonetheless defended the maligned foodstuff. "I love nuts," she said. "I think they are nature's perfect food. I give my dog raw almond butter with her vitamins."

—*Rebecca Mead*

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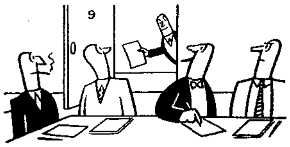
## ON THE BLOCK
## MAKE IT FUNNY



For four years, the comedy team of Steve Brykman, Joe Oesterle, Sean Crespo, and Mason Brown—the Los Angeles-based staff of the *National Lampoon* Web site—were riding high. Their 2002 *Hollywood Reporter* spoof was one of the finest Hollywood-trade-publication parodies ever published, and an album they released this year, "Rules of the Road," was as devastating a satire of trucking songs as you're likely to find. Then, in September, without warning, they were laid off. To save money, the *Lampoon* site's owners were going to rely on freelancers.

After a month of reflection, the team decided to bestow their talents upon a more appreciative audience: eBay. Surely there were legions of people out there who needed help with a witty script, speech, or commercial, people who may not even have known exactly what they were looking for but who would catch auction fever once they happened on eBay Item No. 2966033287: "Former National Lampoon Creative Staff for Sale." The listing was designed to appeal to every market segment: Item A, Mason Brown, "The Aristocrat," embodied "a cautionary tale of dissipation and familial decay befitting Gibbon." Item B, Steve Brykman, "The Jew," was guaranteed to be "still in VG+ condition in original skin." Item C, Sean Crespo, had manifold strengths, including "Abstract/Conceptual humor, Spelling, Hubris," while Item D, Joe Oesterle, "The Confirmed Bachelor," had repeatedly proven himself, "changing the big Sparkletts water bottle when it got empty." As a bidding guideline, the team noted that its usual rates were "$14,000/week or $50,000/month or $250,000/six months or $400,000 per year."

The ten-day auction began on November 18th, and by the end of the day the bidding had soared from fifty dollars to four hundred and five. Then the offers slowed, and the complaints and tire-kicking niggles began. First, a *National Lampoon* executive demanded that the *Lampoon* logo be removed from the listing. Next, a woman from England inquired if Brykman alone could write a "5 minute funny speech" for her husband to deliver at her daughter's bat mitzvah—something "relatively memorable," but only at his "best price."

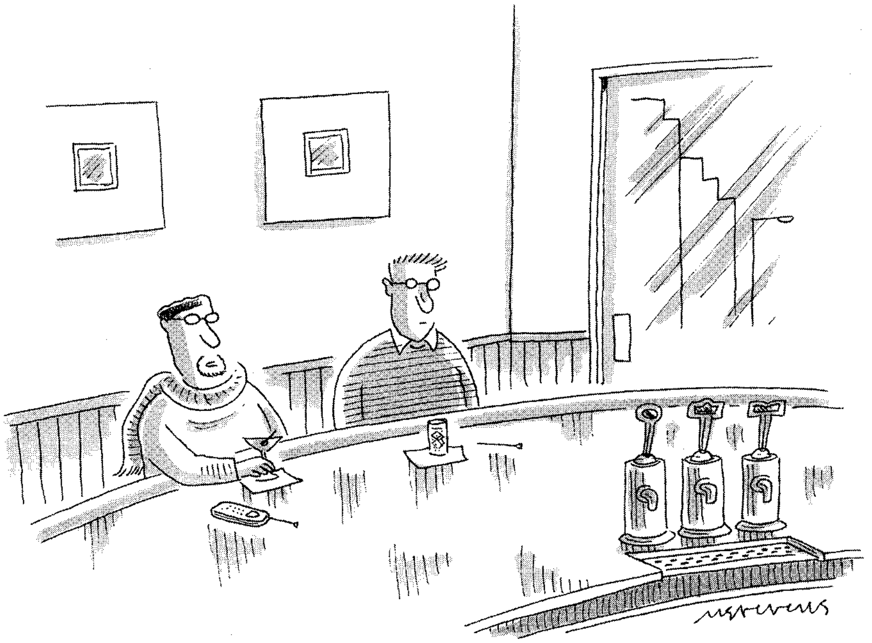
Then Larry Herbst, a television producer from Pasadena, e-mailed to say, "I understand the writers are being sold as a set. Any chance of parting them out? I already have a Jew and a guy who's good with hubris (all right, they're the same guy) but would have use for the old money guy, and possibly the bachelor, depending on his accessories." But Herbst ultimately decided not to bid. Via e-mail, he said, "Another concern I had was . . . what if they're not really funny?"

Richard Bottoms, an actor and screenwriter from Benicia, California, entered the bidding at four hundred and five dollars. Eight days later, he was still in the lead, at five hundred. Bottoms, who says that he is best known as "the African-American gentleman in the green suit sitting behind Gina Gershon in 'Best of the Best 3' who says 'Yes!' after she tells off the skinheads," hoped that the team would punch up his time-travel screenplay, "Flashback," which he believed was only a few jokes away from being "the next 'Galaxy Quest.' " But during the auction's final hours, on November 28th, Bottoms was away from his computer, working as an extra in a Nissan commercial—a fatal mistake.

In the final six seconds of the auction, Tom Campbell swooped in with a winning bid of five hundred and sixty dollars. Campbell is an Orange County entrepreneur who markets an online-auction technology called eSnipe, which makes winning bids in the final six seconds, and he wanted the writers to develop an ad for it. Brykman pitched him a concept right off the bat: Two guys sit at computers side by side as an online auction ticks down. One is frazzled, his finger hovering anxiously over the send key; the other is smugly sipping coffee, knowing that eSnipe is on his side. "It's a pretty good idea," Campbell says. "But don't tell them that yet—I want to get my full man-hours out of these guys."

Steve Brykman was disappointed by the market's valuation of the team—they earned less than half of what he got on eBay for the roof of his Mazda Miata. "We're proven professional comedy writers, you know," he says. "Still, we're going to contact everyone who bid above our reserve price of four hundred dollars and see if they want their hour's worth." Selling to underbidders violates eBay rules, however, and the team's next big break may be the chance to explain themselves to the site's supervisors.

—*Tad Friend*



*"I'm not sure if I'm ready to commit to one phone number for life."*

## THE FINANCIAL PAGE
# JET BLUES

When Phil Condit resigned as the chairman and C.E.O. of Boeing last week, the official version was that he was taking one for the team. Boeing has been embroiled in two defense-contracting scandals this year. First, news broke that in 1999 its employees had stolen thousands of documents from its chief competitor, Lockheed Martin, and used the information to win a contract to make rocket launchers. Then it emerged that Boeing had helped secure a lucrative Pentagon contract for a hundred refuelling tankers by courting an Air Force official in charge of acquisitions with the prospect of a job (which she eventually took). Boeing insisted that Condit hadn't authorized these transgressions, but Condit said he was resigning for the company's good; playing the noble samurai, he chose suicide over dishonor.

How convenient controversy can be. The contracting scandals helped obscure the real story at Boeing, which is that under Condit the company had gone into a tailspin. That may be difficult to imagine. After all, Boeing is one of only two major players—the other is Europe's Airbus—in the global market for commercial jets. It's the nation's second-biggest defense contractor. Two years ago, it earned almost three billion dollars. What could be wrong?

Plenty. The competition between Boeing and Airbus is brutal. You might think that two companies that dominate a market would just divide it up, but Boeing and Airbus fight over every contract, turning each procurement campaign into a steel-cage match. Boeing's aggressive expansion of its defense business—which Condit orchestrated with his 1997 acquisition of McDonnell Douglas—was supposed to diversify the company and give it a stable source of revenue. But, if anything, Boeing has been too quick to look for help from the Pentagon when the rest of its business is going badly, which helps explain why the company has been so ardent in its pursuit of defense contracts. Boeing's most serious problem, though, is one faced by many big companies: its size and its past success have scared it away from real innovation.

It wasn't always like this. Boeing was built on high-stakes gambles, or what industry executives called "sporty" bets. In 1952, the legendary Boeing president Bill Allen made the bold decision to build the 707 jet, even though no one knew if there was a market for it and Boeing had little experience making commercial aircraft. The 707 turned out to be a huge hit. In the mid-sixties, Allen made an all-or-nothing bet when he decided to roll out the 747, the first wide-body passenger jet; the investment required was roughly equal to Boeing's net worth at the time. The company nearly went bankrupt, but in the end the 747 was one of the most lucrative projects in history. Even in the late nineties, the 747 was still generating thirty per cent of Boeing's total profits.

But once Boeing became the dominant player in the aviation market, in the seventies, it lost its appetite for sporty bets: why risk them, when profits were rolling in? Its production lines became notoriously inefficient: the company's nickname was "the lazy B." Like a poker player who tries to grind out small wins while avoiding big losses, Boeing preferred to tinker.

Such caution didn't matter as much in the days before Airbus emerged as a serious competitor. But in the past decade Airbus has introduced a series of planes that are cheaper than and technologically superior to Boeing's, and in 2000 it made the kind of high-stakes gamble that Boeing has avoided, committing itself to build the A-380, a megaplane that is meant to eclipse the 747. This year, Airbus will pass Boeing in worldwide sales of commercial aircraft.

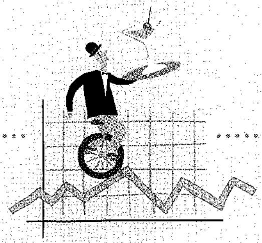
Was this Condit's fault? Well, sure, since he made the decisions not to pursue dramatic innovations that Boeing had contemplated, such as a high-speed jet called the Sonic Cruiser. But really Boeing was undone by its own success. Shareholders wanted steady returns, not big new investments. The Harvard Business School professors Benjamin Esty and Pankaj Ghemawat have shown that Boeing found itself in a near-impossible position when it tried to stop Airbus from building the A-380. Boeing's best hope was to convince Airbus that it was going to build a 747-killer of its own; if both companies made giant planes, both would lose giant sums of money. But for Boeing building a 747-killer would have meant investing billions to cannibalize its own profits, and no one was ready to do that. Airbus called Boeing's bluff.

In the short term, playing it safe is rational enough. But, in the long run, if you stop innovating you will be overtaken, much the way Mike Campbell, in "The Sun Also Rises," describes going broke: "gradually and then suddenly." That's when more desperate measures—stealing documents, say, or working the revolving door—start to seem necessary.

Despite all this, Boeing's crisis could turn out to be an opportunity. In the next few weeks, the company will decide whether to build its first major new plane in eight years: a smaller, fuel-sipping (as opposed to guzzling) jet called the 7E7 Dreamliner, which would be a technologically superior alternative to one of Airbus's most successful planes. The 7E7 has its drawbacks: it would cost a lot, and wouldn't be ready until 2008. But it has the virtue of forcing Airbus into the same bind that Boeing faced a few years ago: invest billions of dollars to replace a perfectly good plane in anticipation of what may happen half a decade from now, or just wait and hope. For once, Boeing has the advantage of being the upstart. It has spent a couple of decades placing little bets. Maybe it's time to go all-in.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

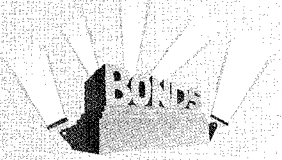


**Amy Falls,** Global Fixed Income Strategist

# Market? Shaken. Bonds? Not stirred.

The last two decades have been good to fixed-income investors. Cumulative returns for bonds have averaged 8.6% since 1990, neck and neck with US equities over the same period—and with considerably less volatility. But looking ahead, bond-market investors will have to work harder to earn less. Overall bond market returns in the next few years are unlikely to match those of the past two decades. Why? Because the last two decades spanned the transition from the worst bear market for bonds in US history (1965-81) to a period of falling inflation and falling interest rates (1985-2003)—the best of all possible worlds.

**We started this "golden age" for bonds with inflation, interest rates and budget deficits all at historic highs.** Since then, globalization, productivity growth, and monetary discipline brought steady disinflation that lent strong support to credit markets. In addition, the cold war's end and fiscal discipline helped shift government deficits to surpluses, helping real interest rates to fall from 9.6%, their 1984 peak, toward 2.8%, the long-term average.



**The current macroeconomic environment poses risks to bond investors...** Rising government borrowing needs, a weaker dollar, and steps to fight deflation by global central banks should usher in higher interest rates during the next 18 months. Both inflation and real interest rates are likely to be under upward pressure. And a slackening commitment to globalization due to rising protectionist sentiment could amplify these risks greatly.

**...however, product innovation and greater asset-allocation opportunities should mitigate the risks.** The good news is that bond markets have benefited from explosive product innovation over the past 20 years. Non-investment-grade markets like high yield, leveraged loans and emerging markets have boomed, as have securitization, basket trading, and derivatives. These developments afford investors the opportunity to move down the credit curve while managing their risks more aggressively. Through liquid credit derivatives, for example, investors can manage credit risk independently from interest-rate risk and express both long and short views. Active sector rotation can capture additional value as performance is more dispersed across fixed-income products than in the past, allowing investors the hope of enhanced returns—even if broad index returns stay in the mid-single-digit range.

**Bonds also offer equity investors better diversification potential than they have in the past.** Compared with the "golden years," bonds should offer better diversification from stocks, as we expect the correlation between the two asset classes to remain negative. Against all expectations, stocks and bonds were positively correlated (returns rose and fell together) for much of the 1980s and 1990s, as productivity gains and declining inflation benefited both markets. Now, however, both assets should track the economic cycle more closely—and stock and bond prices should move in opposite directions.

**Our advice? Be involved, but be nimble.** The easy money may be over, but bonds offer important diversification benefits and a broader range of investment opportunities—and ways to manage risk.

**Amy Falls**
*Global Fixed Income Strategist*

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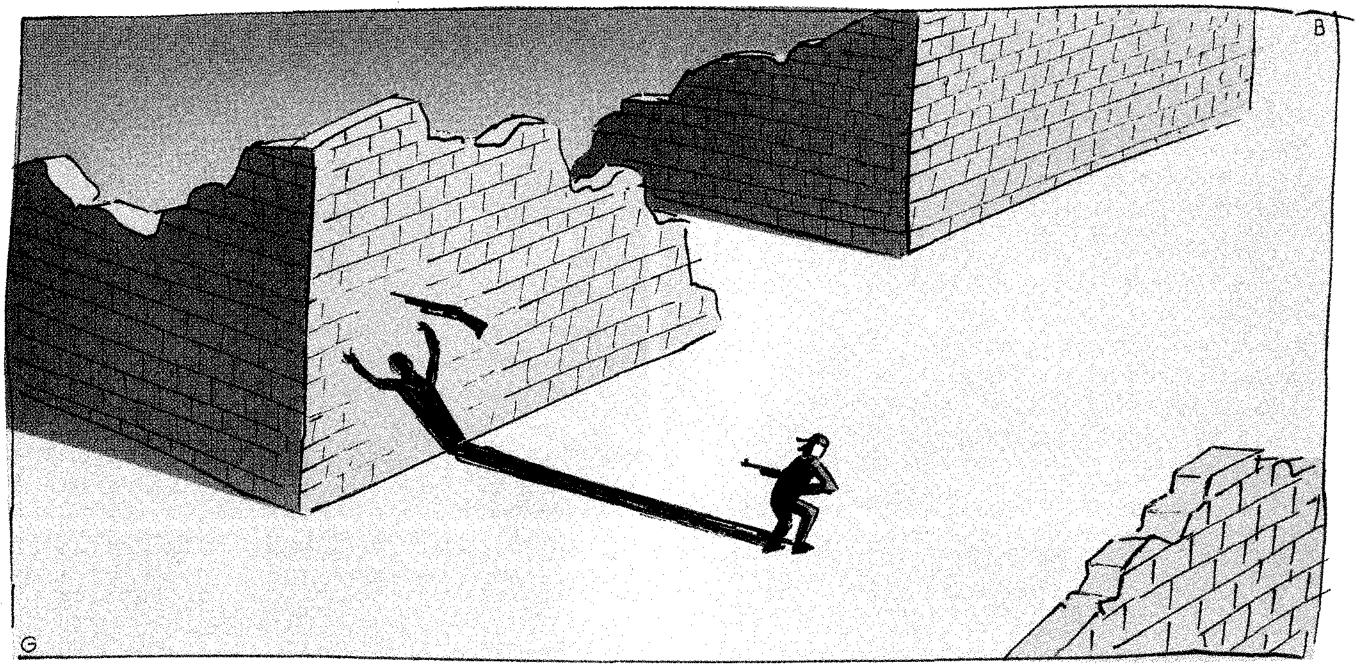
## ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

# MOVING TARGETS

*Will the counter-insurgency plan in Iraq repeat the mistakes of Vietnam?*

### BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

The Bush Administration has authorized a major escalation of the Special Forces covert war in Iraq. In interviews over the past month, American officials and former officials said that the main target was a hard-core group of Baathists who are believed to be behind much of the underground insurgency against the soldiers of the United States and its allies. A new Special Forces group, designated Task Force 121, has been assembled from Army Delta Force members, Navy SEALs, and C.I.A. paramilitary operatives, with many additional personnel ordered to report by January. Its highest priority is the neutralization of the Baathist insurgents, by capture or assassination.



*An American military expert in Baghdad says, "We're going to have to play their game. Guerrilla versus guerrilla."*

GUY BILLOUT

The revitalized Special Forces mission is a policy victory for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who has struggled for two years to get the military leadership to accept the strategy of what he calls "Manhunts"—a phrase that he has used both publicly and in internal Pentagon communications. Rumsfeld has had to change much of the Pentagon's leadership to get his way. "Knocking off two regimes allows us to do extraordinary things," a Pentagon adviser told me, referring to Afghanistan and Iraq.

One step the Pentagon took was to seek active and secret help in the war against the Iraqi insurgency from Israel, America's closest ally in the Middle East. According to American and Israeli military and intelligence officials, Israeli commandos and intelligence units have been working closely with their American counterparts at the Special Forces training base at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and in Israel to help them prepare for operations in Iraq. Israeli commandos are expected to serve as ad-hoc advisers—again, in secret—when full-field operations begin. (Neither the Pentagon nor Israeli diplomats would comment. "No one wants to talk about this," an Israeli official told me. "It's incendiary. Both governments have decided at the highest level that it is in their interests to keep a low profile on U.S.-Israeli coöperation" on Iraq.) The critical issue, American and Israeli officials agree, is intelligence. There is much debate about whether targeting a large number of individuals is a practical—or politically effective—way to bring about stability in Iraq, especially given the frequent failure of American forces to obtain consistent and reliable information there.

Americans in the field are trying to solve that problem by developing a new source of information: they plan to assemble teams drawn from the upper ranks of the old Iraqi intelligence services and train them to penetrate the insurgency. The idea is for the infiltrators to provide information about individual insurgents for the Americans to act on. A former C.I.A. station chief described the strategy in simple terms: "U.S. shooters and Iraqi intelligence." He added, "There are Iraqis in the intelligence business who have a better idea, and we're tapping into them. We have to resuscitate Iraqi intelligence, holding our nose, and have Delta and agency shooters break down doors and take them"—the insurgents—"out."

A former intelligence official said that getting inside the Baathist leadership could be compared to "fighting your way into a coconut—you bang away and bang away until you find a soft spot, and then you can clean it out." An American who

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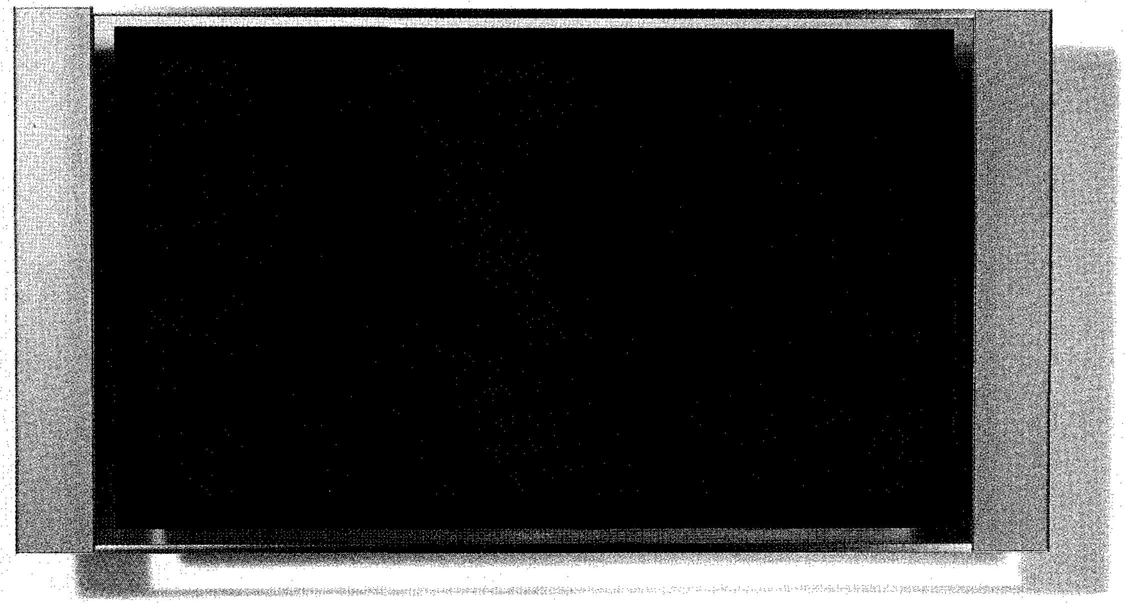

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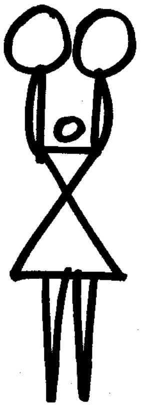
has advised the civilian authority in Baghdad said, "The only way we can win is to go unconventional. We're going to have to play their game. Guerrilla versus guerrilla. Terrorism versus terrorism. We've got to scare the Iraqis into submission."

In Washington, there is now widespread agreement on one point: the need for a new American approach to Iraq. There is also uniform criticism of the military's current response to the growing American casualty lists. One former Pentagon official who worked extensively with the Special Forces command, and who favors the new military initiative, said, "We've got this large conventional force sitting there, and getting their ass shot off, and what we're doing is counterproductive. We're sending mixed signals." The problem with the way the U.S. has been fighting the Baathist leadership, he said, is "(a) we've got no intelligence, and (b) we're too squeamish to operate in this part of the world." Referring to the American retaliation against a suspected mortar site, the former official said, "Instead of destroying an empty soccer field, why not impress me by sneaking in a sniper team and killing them while they're setting up a mortar? We do need a more unconventional response, but it's going to be messy."

Inside the Pentagon, it is now understood that simply bringing in or killing Saddam Hussein and his immediate circle—those who appeared in the Bush Administration's famed "deck of cards"—will not stop the insurgency. The new Special Forces operation is aimed instead at the broad middle of the Baathist underground. But many of the officials I spoke to were skeptical of the Administration's plans. Many of them fear that the proposed operation—called "preëmptive manhunting" by one Pentagon adviser—has the potential to turn into another Phoenix Program. Phoenix was the code name for a counter-insurgency program that the U.S. adopted during the Vietnam War, in which Special Forces teams were sent out to capture or assassinate Vietnamese believed to be working with or sympathetic to the Vietcong. In choosing targets, the Americans relied on information supplied by South Vietnamese Army officers and village chiefs. The operation got out of control. According to official South Vietnamese statistics, Phoenix claimed nearly forty-one thousand victims between 1968 and 1972; the U.S. counted more than twenty thousand in the same time span. Some of those assassinated had nothing to do with the war against America but were targeted because of private grievances. William E. Colby, the C.I.A. officer who took charge of the Phoenix Program in 1968 (he eventually became C.I.A. director), later acknowledged to Congress that "a lot of things were done that should not have been done."



The former Special Forces official warned that the problem with head-hunting is that you have to be sure "you're hunting the right heads." Speaking of the now coöperative former Iraqi intelligence officials, he said, "These guys have their own agenda. Will we be doing hits on grudges? When you set up host-nation elements"—units composed of Iraqis, rather than Americans—"it's hard not to have them going off to do what they want to do. You have to keep them on a short leash."

The former official says that the Baathist leadership apparently relies on "face-to-face communications" in planning terrorist attacks. This makes the insurgents less vulnerable to one of the Army's most secret Special Forces units, known as Grey Fox, which has particular expertise in interception and other technical means of intelligence-gathering. "These guys are too smart to touch cell phones or radio," the former official said. "It's all going to succeed or fail spectacularly based on human intelligence."

A former C.I.A. official with extensive Middle East experience identified one of the key players on the new American-Iraqi intelligence team as Farouq Hijazi, a Saddam loyalist who served for many years as the director of external operations for the Mukhabarat, the Iraqi intelligence service. He has been in custody since late April. The C.I.A. man said that over the past few months Hijazi "has cut a deal," and American officials "are using him to reactivate the old Iraqi intelligence network." He added, "My Iraqi friends say he will honor the deal—but only to the letter, and not to the spirit." He said that although the Mukhabarat was a good security service, capable, in particular, of protecting Saddam Hussein from overthrow or assassination, it was "a lousy intelligence service."

The official went on, "It's not the way we usually play ball, but if you see a couple of your guys get blown away it changes things. We did the American things—and we've been the nice guy. Now we're going to be the bad guy, and being the bad guy works."

Told of such comments, the Pentagon adviser, who is an expert on unconventional war, expressed dismay. "There are people saying all sorts of wild things about Manhunts," he said. "But they aren't at the policy level. It's not a no-holds policy, and it shouldn't be. I'm as tough as anybody, but we're also a democratic society, and we don't fight terror with terror. There will be a lot of close controls—do's and don'ts and rules of engagement." The adviser added, "The problem is that we've not penetrated the bad guys. The Baath Party is run like a cell system. It's like penetrating the Vietcong—we never could do it."

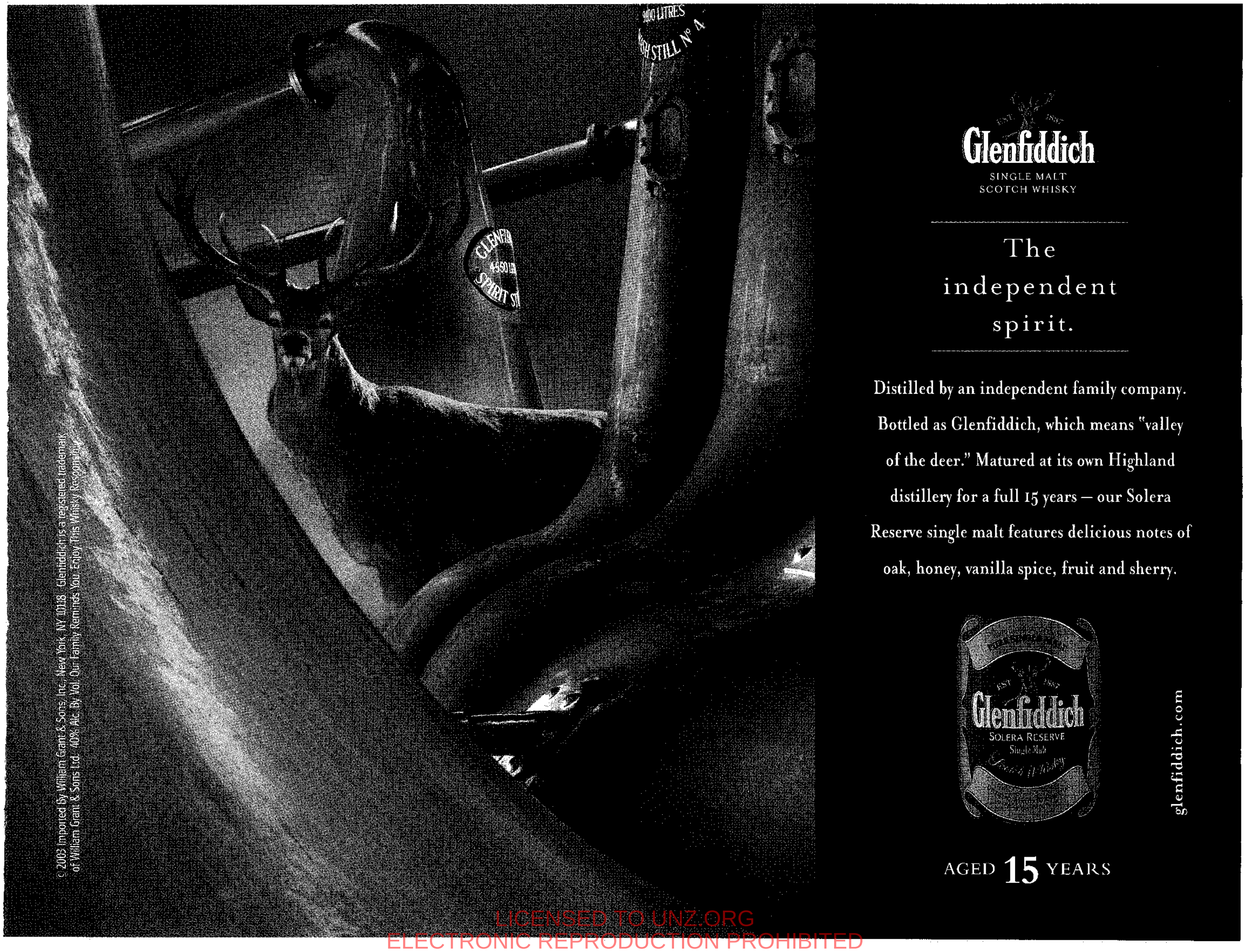
The rising star in Rumsfeld's Pentagon is Stephen Cambone, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, who has been deeply involved in developing the new Special Forces approach. Cambone, who earned a doctorate in political science from Claremont Graduate University in 1982, served as staff director for a 1998 committee, headed by Rumsfeld, that warned in its report of an emerging ballistic-missile threat to the United States and argued that intelligence agencies should be willing to go beyond the data at hand in their analyses. Cambone, in his confirmation hearings, in February, told the Senate that consumers of intelligence assessments must ask questions of the analysts—"how they arrived at those conclusions and what the sources of the information were." This approach was championed by Rumsfeld. It came under attack, however, when the Administration's predictions about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the potential for insurgency failed to be realized, and the Pentagon civilians were widely accused of politicizing intelligence. (A month after the fall of Baghdad, Cambone was the first senior Pentagon official to publicly claim, wrongly, as it turned out, that a captured Iraqi military truck might be a mobile biological-weapons laboratory.)

Cambone also shares Rumsfeld's views on how to fight terrorism. They both believe that the United States needs to become far more proactive in combatting terrorism, searching for terrorist leaders around the world and eliminating them. And Cambone, like Rumsfeld, has been frustrated by the reluctance of the military leadership to embrace the manhunting mission. Since his confirmation, he has been seeking operational authority over Special Forces. "Rumsfeld's been looking for somebody to have all the answers, and Steve is the guy," a former high-level Pentagon official told me. "He has more direct access to Rummy than anyone else."

As Cambone's influence has increased, that of Douglas Feith, the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, has diminished. In September, 2001, Feith set up a special unit known as the Office of Special Plans. The office, directed by civilians who, like Feith, had neoconservative views, played a major role in the intelligence and planning leading up to the March invasion of Iraq. "There is finger-pointing going on," a prominent Republican lobbyist explained. "And the neocons are in retreat."

One of the key planners of the Special Forces offensive is Lieutenant General William (Jerry) Boykin, Cambone's military assistant. After a meeting with Rumsfeld early last summer—they got along "like two old warriors," the Pentagon consultant said—Boykin postponed his retirement, which had been planned for June, and took the Pentagon job, which brought him a third star. In that post, the Pentagon adviser told me, Boykin has been "an important piece" of the planned escalation. In October, the Los Angeles *Times* reported that Boykin, while giving Sunday-morning talks in uniform to church groups, had repeatedly equated the Muslim world with Satan. Last June, according to the paper, he told a congregation in Oregon that "Satan wants to destroy this nation, he wants to destroy us as a nation, and he wants to destroy us as a Christian army." Boykin praised President Bush as a "man who prays in the Oval Office," and declared that Bush was "not elected" President but "appointed by God." The Muslim world hates America, he said, "because we are a nation of believers."

There were calls in the press and from Congress for Boykin's dismissal, but Rumsfeld made it clear that he wanted to keep his man in the job. Initially, he responded to the *Times* report by praising the General's "outstanding record" and telling journalists that he had neither seen the text of Boykin's statements nor watched the videotape that had been made of one of his presentations. "There are a lot of things that are said by people in the military, or in civilian life, or in the Congress, or in the executive branch that are their views," he said. "We're a free people. And that's the wonderful thing about our country." He



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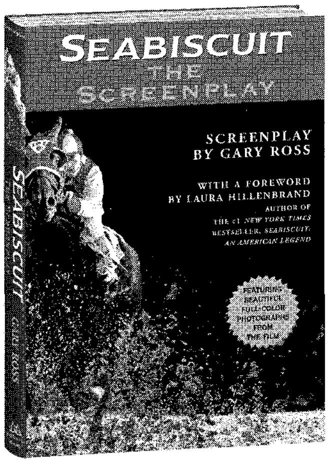
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added, with regard to the tape, "I just simply can't comment on what he said, because I haven't seen it." Four days later, Rumsfeld said that he had viewed the tape. "It had a lot of very difficult-to-understand words with subtitles which I was not able to verify," he said at a news conference, according to the official transcript. "So I remain inexpert"—the transcript notes that he "chuckles" at that moment—"on precisely what he said." Boykin's comments are now under official review.

Boykin has been involved in other controversies as well. He was the Army combat commander in Mogadishu in 1993, when eighteen Americans were slain during the disastrous mission made famous by Mark Bowden's book "Black Hawk Down." Earlier that year, Boykin, a colonel at the time, led an eight-man Delta Force that was assigned to help a Colombian police unit track down the notorious drug dealer Pablo Escobar. Boykin's team was barred by law from providing any lethal assistance without Presidential approval, but there was suspicion in the Pentagon that it was planning to take part in the assassination of Escobar, with the support of American Embassy officials in Colombia. The book "Killing Pablo," an account, also by Mark Bowden, of the hunt for Escobar, describes how senior officials in the Pentagon's chain of command became convinced that Boykin, with the knowledge of his Special Forces superiors, had exceeded his authority and intended to violate the law. They wanted Boykin's unit pulled out. It wasn't. Escobar was shot dead on the roof of a barrio apartment building in Medellín. The Colombian police were credited with getting their man, but, Bowden wrote, "within the special ops community . . . Pablo's death was regarded as a successful mission for Delta, and legend has it that its operators were in on the kill."

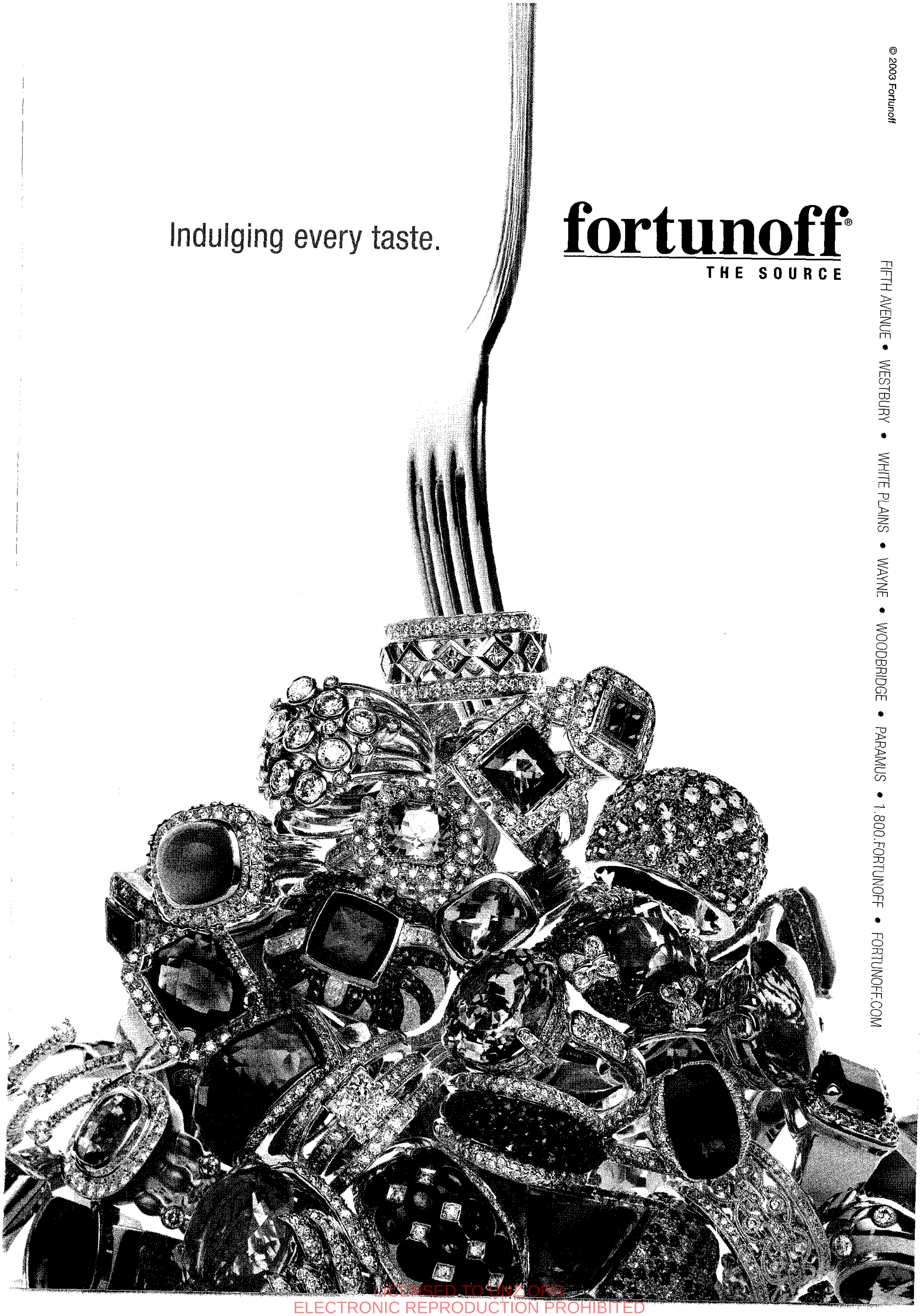
"That's what those guys did," a retired general who monitored Boykin's operations in Colombia told me. "I've seen pictures of Escobar's body that you don't get from a long-range telescope lens. They were taken by guys on the assault team." (Bush Administration officials in the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon, including General Boykin, did not respond to requests for comment.)

Morris Busby, who was the American Ambassador to Colombia in 1993 (he is now retired), vigorously defended Boykin. "I think the world of Jerry Boykin, and have the utmost respect for him. I've known him for fifteen years and spent hours and hours with the guy, and never heard him mention religion or God." The retired general also praised Boykin as "one of those guys you'd love to have in a war because he's not afraid to die." But, he added, "when you get to three stars you've got to think through what you're doing." Referring to Boykin and others involved in the Special Forces planning, he added, "These guys are going to get a bunch of guys killed and then give them a bunch of medals."

The American-Israeli liaison on Iraq amounts to a tutorial on how to dismantle an insurgency. One former Israeli military-intelligence officer summarized the core lesson this way: "How to do targeted killing, which is very relevant to the success of the war, and what the United States is going to have to do." He told me that the Americans were being urged to emulate the Israeli Army's small commando units, known as Mist'aravim, which operate undercover inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "They can approach a house and pounce," the former officer said. In the Israeli view, he added, the Special Forces units must learn "how to maintain a network of informants." Such a network, he said, has made it possible for Israel to penetrate the West Bank and Gaza Strip organizations controlled by groups such as Hamas, and to assassinate or capture potential suicide bombers along with many of the people who recruit and train them.

On the other hand, the former officer said, "Israel has, in many ways, been too successful, and has killed or captured so many mid-ranking facilitators on the operational level in the West Bank that Hamas now consists largely of isolated cells that carry out terrorist attacks against Israel on their own." He went on, "There is no central control over many of the suicide bombers. We're trying to tell the Americans that they don't want to eliminate the center. The key is not to have freelancers out there."

Many regional experts, Americans and others, are convinced that the



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Baathists are still firmly in charge of the insurgency, although they are thought to have little direct connection with Saddam Hussein. An American military analyst who works with the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad told me he has concluded that "mid-ranking Baathists who were muzzled by the patrimonial nature of Saddam's system have now, with the disappearance of the high-ranking members, risen to control the insurgency." He added that after the American attack and several weeks "of being like deer in headlights," these Baathists had become organized, and were directing and leading operations against Americans. During an interview in Washington, a senior Arab diplomat noted, "We do not believe that the resistance is loyal to Saddam. Yes, the Baathists have reorganized, not for political reasons but because of the terrible decisions made by Jerry Bremer"—the director of the C.P.A. "The Iraqis really want to make you pay the price," the diplomat said. "Killing Saddam will not end it."

Similarly, a Middle Eastern businessman who has advised senior Bush Administration officials told me that the reorganized Baath Party is "extremely active, working underground with permanent internal communications. And without Saddam." Baath Party leaders, he added, expect Saddam to issue a public statement of self-criticism, "telling of his mistakes and his excesses," including his reliance on his sons.

*"This time of year, with the office parties and the family visits, and having to shop for everyone you know—I'm truly thankful that I'm inside."*

There is disagreement, inevitably, on the extent of Baathist control. The former Israeli military-intelligence officer said, "Most of the firepower comes from the Baathists, and they know where the weapons are kept. But many of the shooters are ethnic and tribal. Iraq is very factionalized now, and within the Sunni community factionalism goes deep." He added, "Unless you settle this, any effort at reconstruction in the center is hopeless."

The American military analyst agreed that the current emphasis on Baathist control "overlooks the nationalist and tribal angle." For example, he said, the anti-coalition forces in Falluja, a major center of opposition, are "driven primarily by the sheikhs and mosques, Islam, clerics, and nationalism." The region, he went on, contains "tens of thousands of unemployed former military officers and enlistees who hang around the coffee shops and restaurants of their relatives; they plot, plan, and give and receive instructions; at night they go out on their missions."

This military analyst, like many officials I spoke to, also raised questions about the military's more conventional tactics—the aggressive program, code-named Iron Hammer, of bombings, nighttime raids, and mass arrests aimed at trouble spots in Sunni-dominated central Iraq. The insurgents, he told me, had already developed a response. "Their S.O.P."—standard operating procedure—"now is to go further out, or even to other towns, so that American retribution does not fall on their locale. Instead, the Americans take it out on the city where the incident happened, and in the process they succeed in making more enemies."

The brazen Iraqi attacks on two separate American convoys in Samarra, on November 30th, provided further evidence of the diversity of the opposition to the occupation. Samarra has been a center of intense anti-Saddam feelings, according to Ahmed S. Hashim, an expert on terrorism who is a professor of strategic studies at the U.S. Naval War College. In an essay published in August by the Middle East Institute, Hashim wrote, "Many Samarra natives—who had served with distinction in the Baath Party and the armed forces—were purged or executed during the course of the three decades of rule by Saddam and his cronies from the rival town of Tikrit." He went on, "The type of U.S. force structure in Iraq—heavy armored and mechanized units—and the psychological disposition of these forces which have been in Iraq for months is simply not conducive to the successful waging of counter-insurgency warfare."

The majority of the Bush Administration's manhunting missions remain classified, but one earlier mission, in Afghanistan, had mixed results at best. Last November, an Al Qaeda leader named Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi was killed when an unmanned Predator reconnaissance aircraft fired a Hellfire missile at his automobile in Yemen. Five passengers in the automobile were also killed, and it was subsequently reported that two previous Predator missions in Yemen had been called off at the last moment when it was learned that the occupants of suspect vehicles were local Bedouins, and not Al Qaeda members.

Since then, an adviser to the Special Forces command has told me, infighting among the various senior military commands has made it difficult for Special Forces teams on alert to take immediate advantage of time-sensitive intelligence. Rumsfeld repeatedly criticized Air Force General Charles Holland, a four-star Special Forces commander who has just retired, for his reluctance to authorize commando raids without specific, or "actionable," intelligence. Rumsfeld has also made a systematic effort to appoint Special Forces advocates to the top military jobs. Another former Special Forces commander, Army General Peter Schoomaker, was brought out of retirement in July and named Army Chief of Staff. The new civilian Assistant Secretary for Special Operations in the Pentagon is Thomas O'Connell, an Army veteran who served in the Phoenix Program in Vietnam, and who, in the early eighties, ran Grey Fox, the Army's secret commando unit.

Early in November, the *Times* reported the existence of Task Force 121, and said that it was authorized to take action throughout the region, if necessary, in pursuit of Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and other terrorists. (The task force is commanded by Air Force Brigadier General Lyle Koenig, an experienced Special Forces helicopter pilot.) At that point, the former Special Forces official told me, the troops were "chasing the deck of cards. Their job was to find Saddam, period." Other Special Forces, in Afghanistan, were targeting what is known as the A.Q.S.L., the Al Qaeda Senior Leadership List.

The task force's search for Saddam was, from the beginning, daunting. According to Scott Ritter, a former United Nations weapons inspector, it may have been fatally flawed as well. From 1994 to 1998, Ritter directed a special U.N. unit that eavesdropped on many of Saddam Hussein's private telephone communications. "The high-profile guys around Saddam were the *murafaqin*, his most loyal companions, who could stand next to him carrying a gun," Ritter told me. "But now he's gone to a different tier—the tribes. He has released the men from his most sensitive units and let them go back to their tribes, and we don't know where they are. The manifests of those units are gone; they've all been destroyed." Ritter added, "Guys like Farouq Hijazi can deliver some of the Baath Party cells, and he knows where some of the intelligence people are. But he can't get us into the tribal hierarchy." The task force, in any event, has shifted its focus from the hunt for Saddam as it is increasingly distracted by the spreading guerrilla war.

In addition to the Special Forces initiative, the military is also exploring other approaches to suppressing the insurgency. The Washington *Post* reported last week that the American authorities in Baghdad had agreed, with some reluctance, to the formation of an Iraqi-led counter-terrorism militia composed of troops from the nation's five largest political parties. The paramilitary unit, totalling some eight hundred troops or so, would "identify and pursue insurgents" who had eluded arrest, the newspaper said. The group's initial missions would be monitored and approved by American commanders, but eventually it would operate independently.

Task Force 121's next major problem may prove to be Iran. There is a debate going on inside the Administration about American and Israeli intelligence that suggests that the Shiite-dominated Iranian government may be actively aiding the Sunni-led insurgency in Iraq—"pulling the strings on the puppet," as one former intelligence official put it. Many in the intelligence community are skeptical of this analysis—the Pentagon adviser compared it to "the Chalabi stuff," referring to now discredited prewar intelligence on

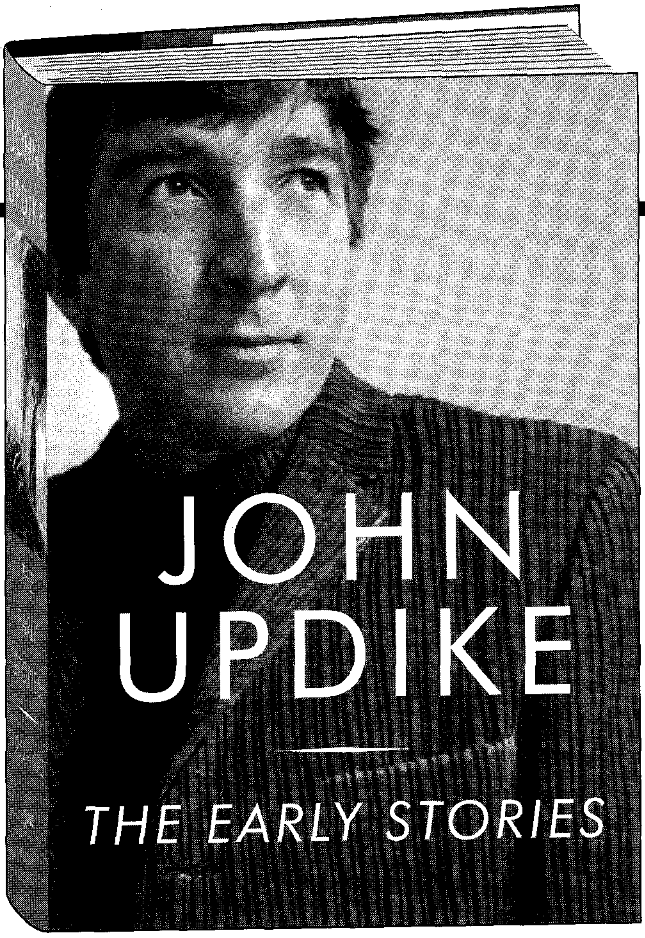
*"We were two ships that passed in the night for a couple of nights in a row."*

W.M.D. supplied by Iraqi defectors. But I was told by several officials that the intelligence was considered to be highly reliable by civilians in the Defense Department. A former intelligence official said that one possible response under consideration was for the United States to train and equip an Iraqi force capable of staging cross-border raids. The American goal, he said, would be to "make the cost of supporting the Baathists so dear that the Iranians would back off," adding, "If it begins to look like another Iran-Iraq war, that's another story."

The requirement that America's Special Forces units operate in secrecy, a former senior coalition adviser in Baghdad told me, has provided an additional incentive for increasing their presence in Iraq. The Special Forces in-country numbers are not generally included in troop totals. Bush and Rumsfeld have insisted that more American troops are not needed, but that position was challenged by many senior military officers in private conversations with me. "You need more people," the former adviser, a retired admiral, said. "But you can't add them, because Rummy's taken a position. So you invent a force that won't be counted."

At present, there is no legislation that requires the President to notify Congress before authorizing an overseas Special Forces mission. The Special Forces have been expanded enormously in the Bush Administration. The 2004 Pentagon budget provides more than six and a half billion dollars for their activities—a thirty-four-per-cent increase over 2003. A recent congressional study put the number of active and reserve Special Forces troops at forty-seven thousand, and has suggested that the appropriate House and Senate committees needed to debate the "proper overall role" of Special Forces in the global war on terrorism.

The former intelligence official depicted the Delta and SEAL teams as "force multipliers"—small units that can do the work of much larger ones and thereby increase the power of the operation as a whole. He also implicitly recognized that such operations would become more and more common; when Special Forces target the Baathists, he said, "it's technically not assassination—it's normal combat operations." ♦



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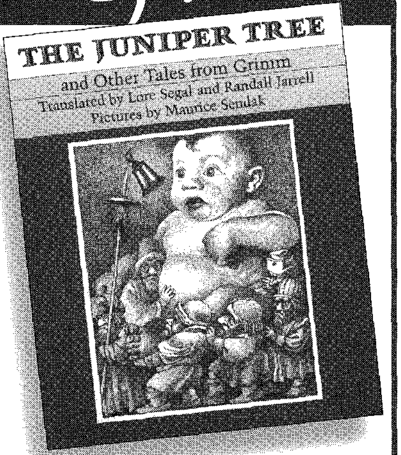
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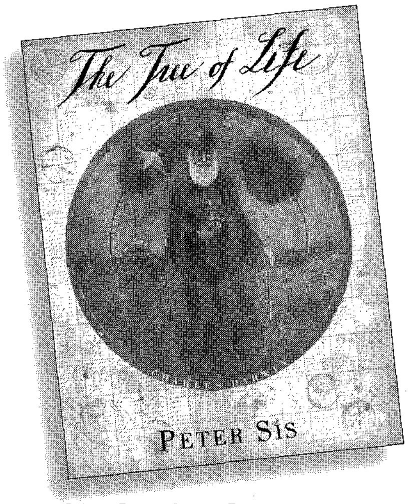

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I have a lot of weird thoughts. You ever wonder why, for example, seven times eight is fifty-six? What *genius* decided that one? I don't remember voting. Or where socks go when they disappear from dryers? Is it the Pentagon? I think you know it is.

Anybody else here watch TV? Me, I watch a lot of TV. A lot of TV. Because, you know, when you're not watching it, it can watch you. So I watch TV pretty much all the time. Have you seen this "Gilligan's Island"? Seven stranded castaways in a desert-island paradise? What is *up* with *that*? All I know is if I was Gilligan and it was my island I'd sure as shit be fucking that Ginger. Am I right? And Mary Ann. And the rest. I'd be lying naked in my hammock with those two gals and Mrs. Howell and the Professor, and drinking sweet, sweet coconut juice out of the Skipper's skull. Am I right?

Hey, remember that lady who'd fallen and couldn't get up? *I've fallen and I can't get up. I've fallen and I can't get up.* You know why she can't get up, don't you? Because they control the gravity and she found out.

You can bet I'd be having sex with her, too.

Travel a lot in this job. Gotta keep moving, or you get pulled into the earth by trolls. What is *their* problem?

So I fly a lot, on planes mostly. Airline food: now, what demented individual came up with this item? I mean, who eats chicken? What if the chickens found out? They would not be happy.

Can't get a decent knife on an airplane anymore. It's all plastic now. Like, what? I'm going to stab and stab and stab the passenger sitting next to me? And how do they know what you're thinking? Here's a hint: don't eat the peanuts.

They've got a lot of crazy laws in this country. Screwy laws. Like in Tennessee it's illegal to stand in the middle of the street, *even if you've been instructed to do so*. And in Maine it's against the law to spit on babies. Pretty babies, ugly babies, it doesn't matter. Crazy. They'll arrest you for anything.

Am I the only one here planning on shooting the President? Show of hands: who's with me?

That's right, best keep it to yourself. They can trace your e-mails now, using DNA that the keys on the keyboard extract from your fingertips. I can't believe I invented that technology and then they go and use it against me. Totally nuts.

I'm going to cry for a little bit now. Could we turn off the mike and take the lights down?

Great. I'm done!

How are those margaritas treating you? Strange name, margarita. Means "little Margaret." The funny thing is, she tastes nothing like that. It's just insane. Can I have a sip of yours? Thanks. Delicious. I hope you don't mind; I have every kind of cancer. Including a couple of new ones the N.I.H. just disseminated.

I'm a little neurotic when it comes to food. I won't eat anything orange. The color doesn't actually exist, which should be a tipoff. I also won't eat possum, because you can never tell if it's really dead. And when I kill and eat my enemies, who are legion, I forgo the eyeballs, because I don't want them checking out my insides and reporting back to *you know who*.

Well, that flashing light means that either Jesus has come for me as promised or my time is up. So, *good night!* And don't forget to tip your waitresses, especially that one over there: she's in love with me. ♦

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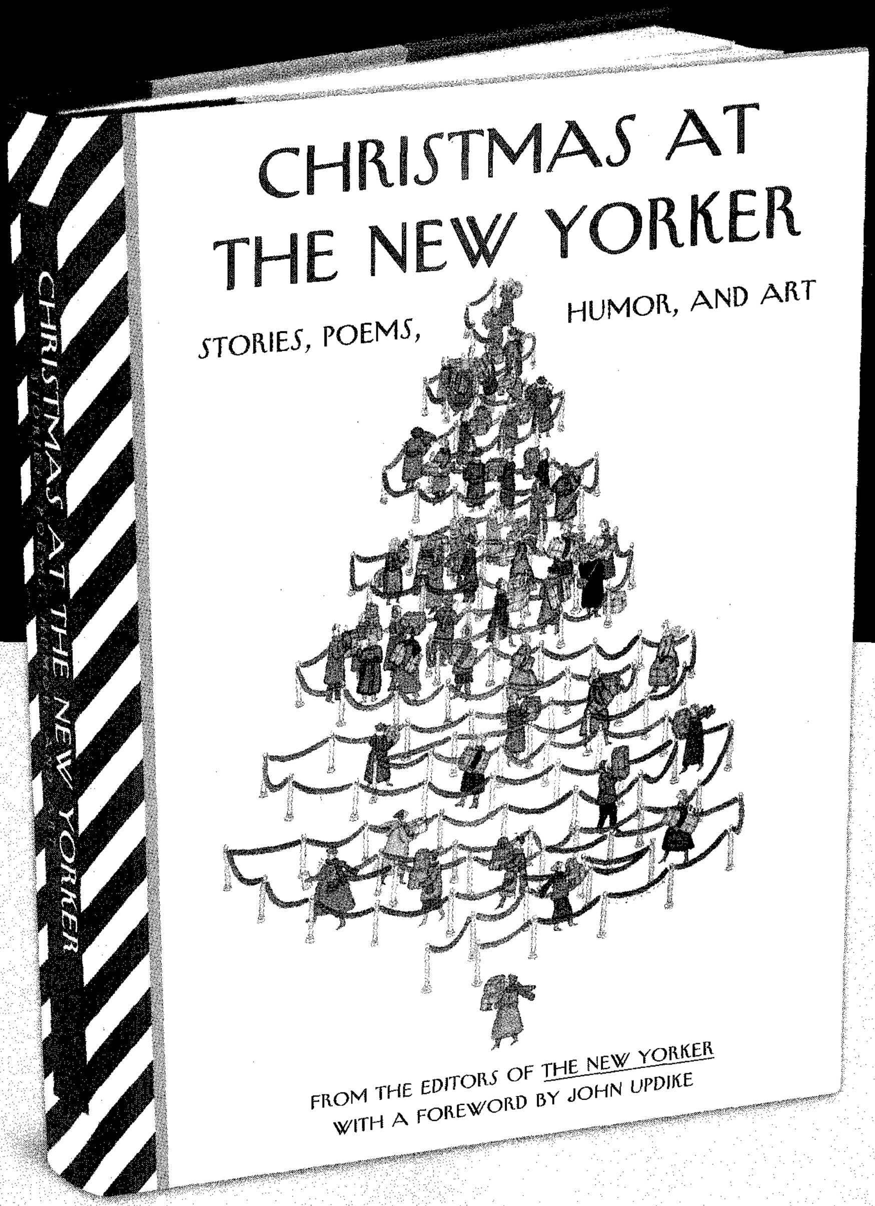
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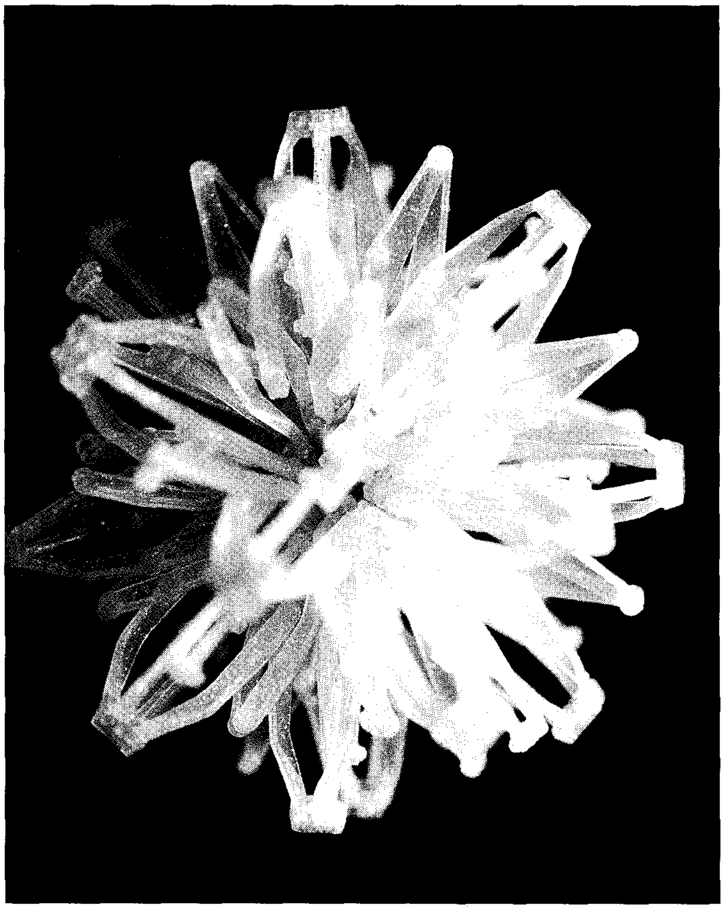
### ANNALS OF INVENTION

# CHILD'S PLAY

*What makes a toy fun?*

BY JOHN SEABROOK

In 1913, an Illinois stonemason named Charles Pajeau created a toy after seeing his children playing with pencils and empty thread spools—he called it Tinkertoy. In 1916, John Lloyd Wright, the son of the architect, invented Lincoln Logs, a toy inspired by watching the earthquake-proof, "floating cantilever construction" of his father's Imperial Hotel, in Tokyo. During the Second World War, a mechanical engineer named Richard James was working on ships' suspension systems when a torsion spring fell off his desk and flopped over, and the way it wiggled struck him as funny. His wife, Betty, paging through the dictionary, came upon a word for the toy: Slinky. In 1982, a NASA nuclear engineer named Lonnie Johnson was working at home on a high-pressure pump when a jet of water accidentally shot across the bathroom. Since then, more than two hundred million Super Soakers have been sold.



*The Hoberman Sphere. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.*

Seventeen years ago, Chuck Hoberman was a kinetic sculptor, with a degree in fine art from Cooper Union and a degree in mechanical engineering from Columbia University. He and his wife, Carolyn, who was also an artist, lived in a seventh-floor walkup just below Canal Street, in a dilapidated building with a sign outside that said, "Gentleman—Please Do Not Urinate on the Door. It Is Unsanitary." Chuck was interested in transformations—mechanical objects that could change their size without changing their shape. "I was obsessed with the idea of making objects disappear," he told me. "Not as a magic trick, but where the object could self-transform—change itself by itself." He tried to imagine a scissors hinge, like those you see in old-fashioned elevator doors, except in three dimensions, so that the structure could expand into a dome or a sphere. What would the geometry of such a structure look like? Early in the morning, before going off to his job at an engineering firm, Chuck would sit in his "study" (created by hanging a sheet between the desk and the bed), folding pieces of paper into triangles, pentagons, and polyhedrons. He worked on the problem for several years, but he made no progress.

The Hobermans are Buddhists, and one day in the spring of 1987 they were visiting their teacher's retreat, at a farm in the Hudson Valley. "I was listening to a great Tibetan lama who was teaching the philosophy of mind, a kind of brick-by-brick construction of the proper view of consciousness," Chuck recalled. "Each point was introduced, examined from the point of view of several different schools of Buddhist thought, then synthesized into a conclusion that led to the next point. I was supposed to be meditating, but I was drifting. It was a beautiful spring day, and the room was warm. Then there was a click, and in an instant I saw the solution to my obsession. I saw a linkage—a hinged loop of pieces moving in space. I could see how two, three, many linkages could be attached to one another to build up an entire transforming volume."

Chuck took out a patent on the idea, which was described in the technical literature as a "Doubly-Curved Truss Structure." He thought of his structure as art, but he wanted to prove that it had a practical, money-making purpose as well; utility is an essential part of Chuck's aesthetic. He had a series of conversations with Martin Mikulas, who was then the head of structural concepts at NASA's Langley Research Center, about developing his invention for space travel. He also spoke to a tent manufacturer about making a tent that wouldn't require poles, a luggage-maker about creating suitcases and trunks that could fold up for easier storage, and a medical-equipment manufacturer about making instruments for non-invasive surgery. Everyone Chuck spoke to was certain that he had invented something valuable, but no one was sure exactly what it was.

The notion that what Chuck Hoberman had invented was a toy came from Anthony Gentile, who, along with his twin brother, John, is a partner in Abrams Gentile Entertainment, a firm

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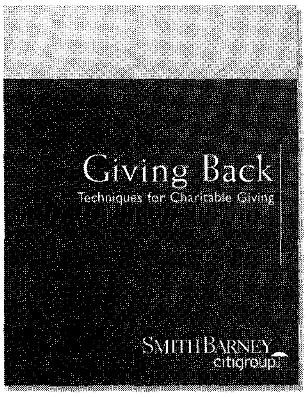

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that creates toys and brokers ideas to larger manufacturers. Most independent inventors need toy brokers in order to gain access to the industry. Hasbro and Mattel, which between them account for about thirty-five per cent of the industry's twenty billion dollars in annual domestic sales, don't even consider independent solicitations.

The Gentiles had read about Chuck's invention in the Patents column of the *Times*, and asked him to meet them at their offices, situated across from the now boarded-up Broadway saloon Legz Diamond's, on West Fifty-fourth Street. "John and Anthony are these intense New York guys, and they both talk really fast," Chuck recalled. "They look exactly the same, and there was one of them on either side of me—it was like listening to them in stereo."

"When we met Chuck, he had his sights set on outer space," Anthony Gentile told me. "You know Chuck; he's a big thinker. He was talking about building space stations and whatnot, and we said to him, 'That sounds great, Chuck, but how about this—a collapsible playhouse that you can fold up small enough to fit into your back pocket!' "

The Gentiles hired Chuck to develop that idea and several other toys, and they had a prototype of the playhouse manufactured, which they showed to Mattel in the hope of working out a licensing deal. "Mattel loved that toy," Anthony said, "except for the price point—which was, like, fifty dollars. And, let me tell you, everything in the toy business is about price point." In recent years, as the toy industry has seen its claim on playtime challenged by video games, toymakers have become intensely focussed on price; more than sixty-five per cent of American toys sell for twenty dollars or less. "I could make a doll levitate, with no strings—a miracle!" Anthony says. "But if I can't do it for $19.95 they're not interested."

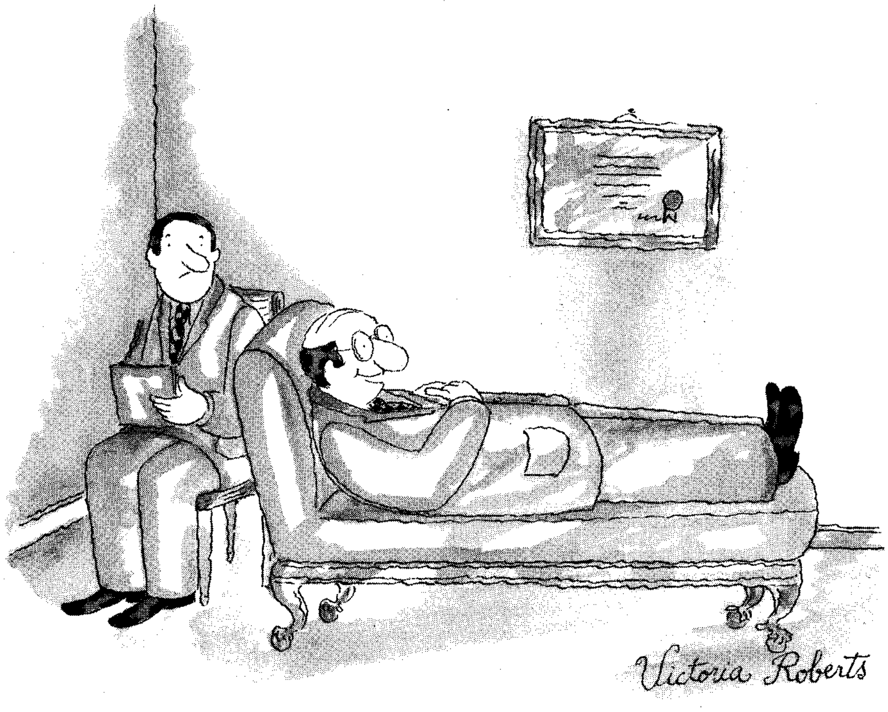
Chuck worked for the Gentiles for two years, developing ideas for toys, but none of them sold, and when his contract ended he was ready to return to his career as an artist. A curator of design at the Museum of Modern Art asked him to create a piece for a MOMA show, and Chuck made a dome that could open from the center, like an iris. He also built the two-story-high transforming sphere that visitors to the Liberty Science Center, in Jersey City, encounter just inside the main entrance. These projects didn't earn Chuck much money, but they did bring him artistic credibility, and that was what he really wanted.

Carolyn had a different vision. "I had been going to toy fairs, meeting people, and I found the toy world to be very interesting," she told me. She persuaded Chuck to focus on making a toy sphere. What Chuck came up with was an unlikely toy, a transformer that changes its shape as it expands, from a sea-urchin-like bundle of hinges into a sphere of delicately attenuated struts. Each hinge unfolds while at the same time pivoting, so that its relationship to the other hinges remains the same. The struts inscribe a series of triangles and pentagons that intersect with each other, and the points of intersection form geodesic circles that are similar to the shapes described by Buckminster Fuller, who was an inspiration for Chuck.

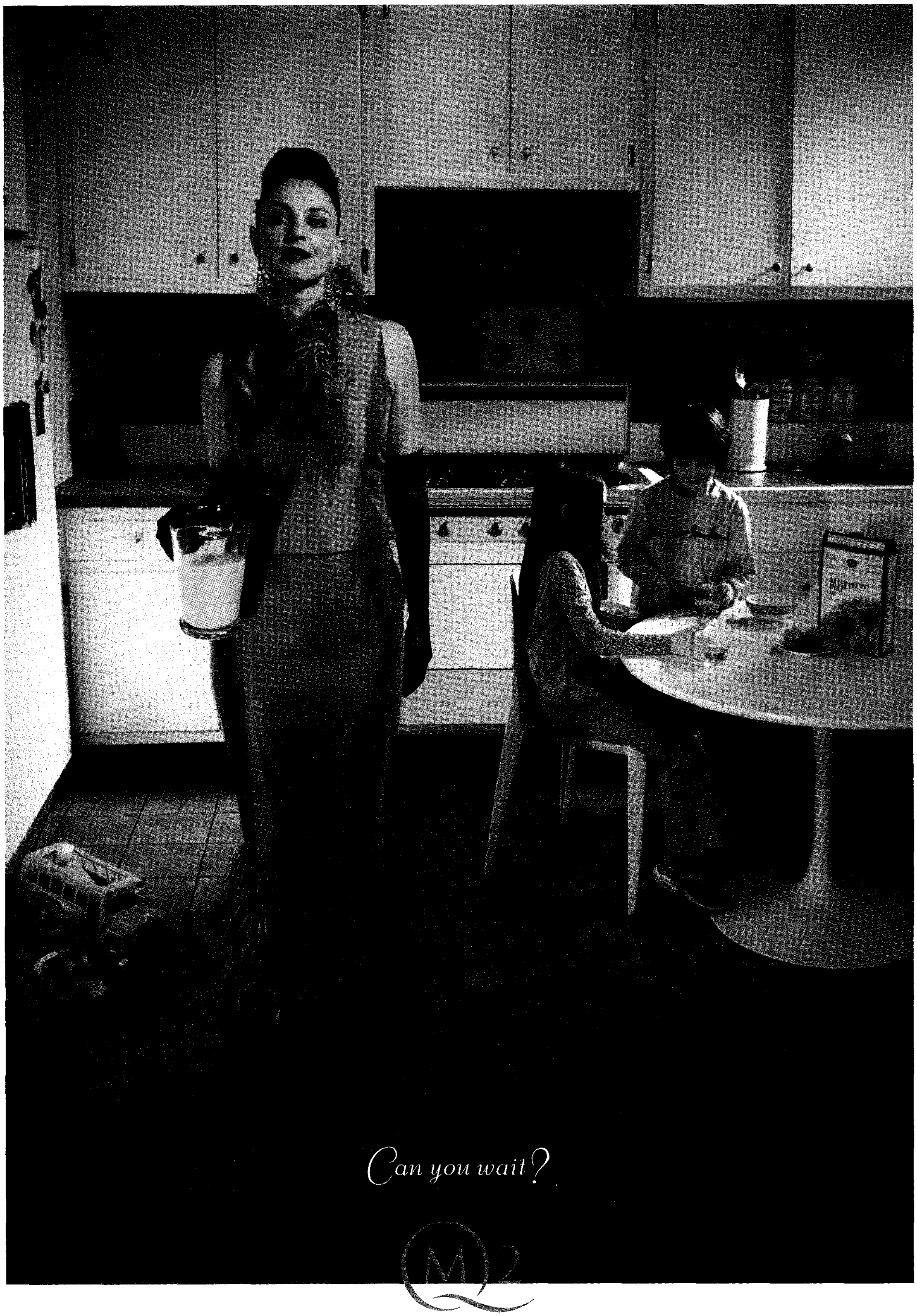
Carolyn found a manufacturer in New Jersey that could make the parts for the toy sphere, and together they raised money to pay for the materials and the production costs. Carolyn also designed the packaging for the product, which they called the Hoberman Sphere, and which consisted of more than four hundred acrylic pieces that required assembly at home. The Hobermans took it around to the major toy fairs, including those in New York, San Francisco, and Nuremberg. They didn't get many orders from retailers, but they did get invaluable advice from other toymakers, notably Dennis Binkley, the founder of Geospace International, in Seattle. He convinced the Hobermans that, for financial reasons, their product should be made in China. "He also told me our packaging was terrible," Carolyn says with a laugh.

In May of 1995, Carolyn accompanied Binkley on his next trip to China. "The factory said to us, 'Do you need the toy to snap together?' " she recalled. "And we said, 'No, I guess not.' And they said, 'Could we make it out of polypro?,' and we said, 'Sure.' " Samples of this new Hoberman Sphere—a lightweight, polypropylene thirty-inch toy that now required no assembly at home—came back from China later that year. In 1997, the Hobermans brought out a twelve-inch version, and the Store of Knowledge, a high-end retail chain, bought practically the entire supply.

The Hobermans' big break came on August 16, 1998, when the Reverend Walter Shrophire, Jr., of Foundry United Methodist Church, in Washington, D.C., used a Hoberman Sphere as a visual aid in a sermon that he was giv-



*"When you die, can I have this couch?"*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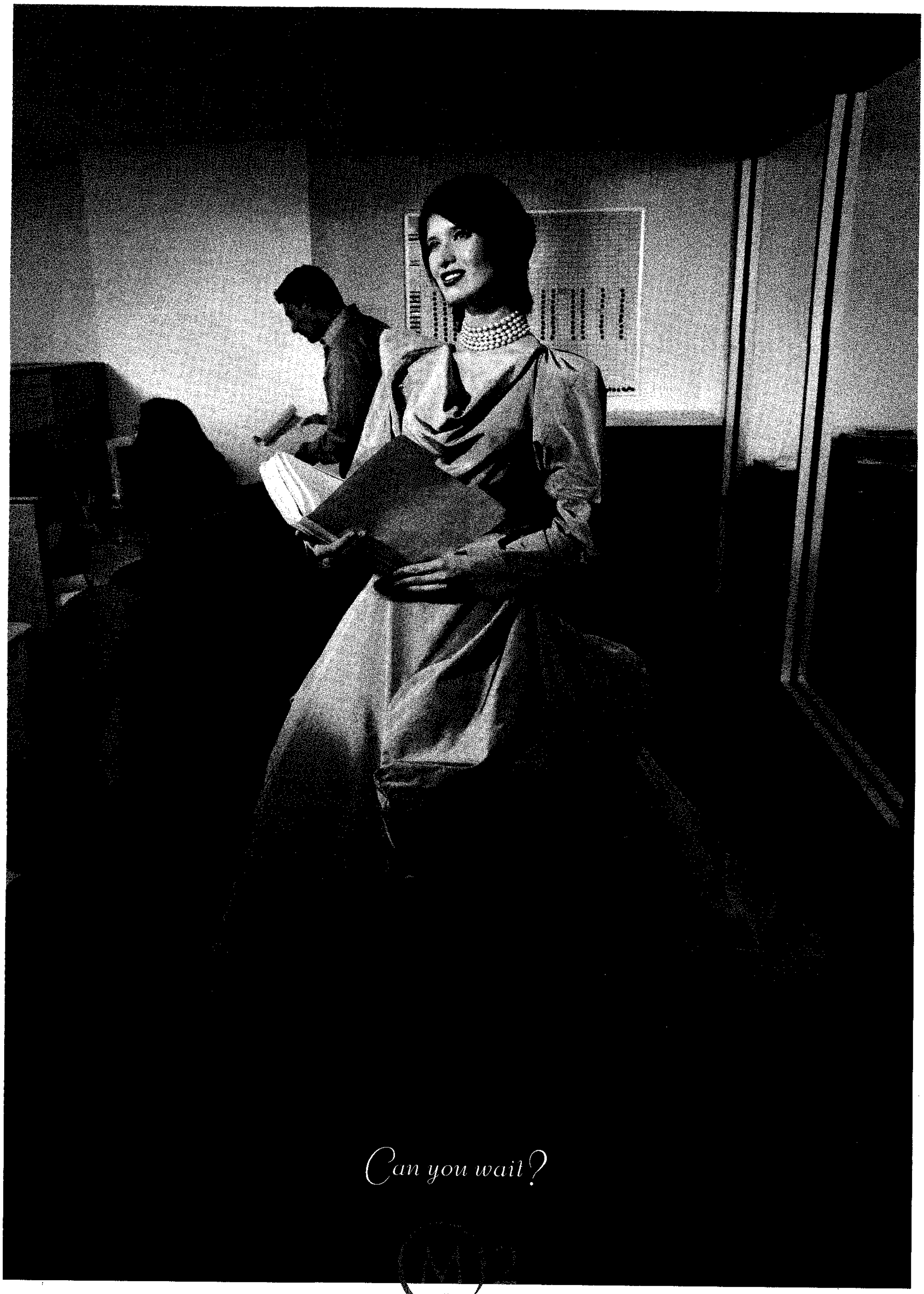
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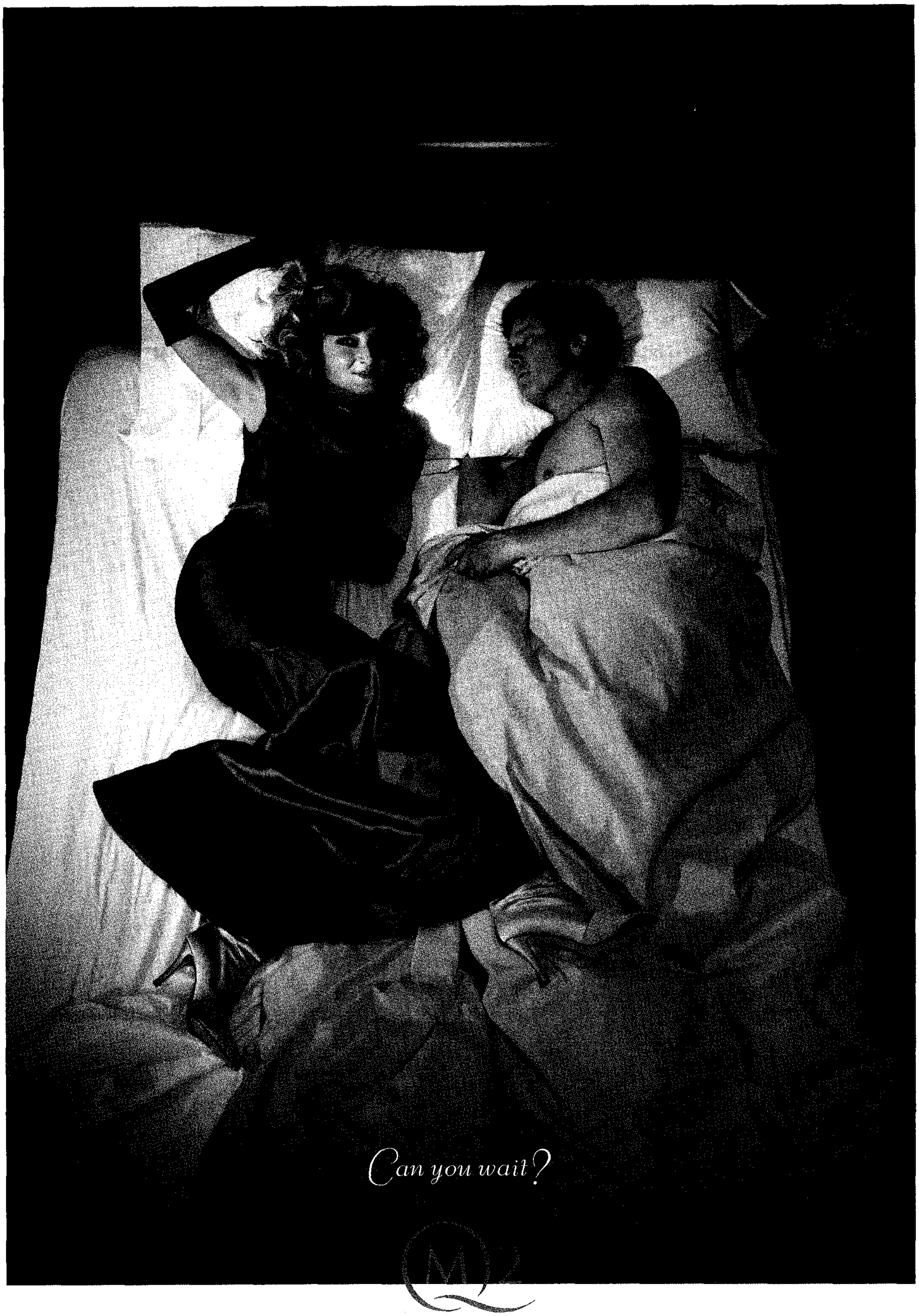
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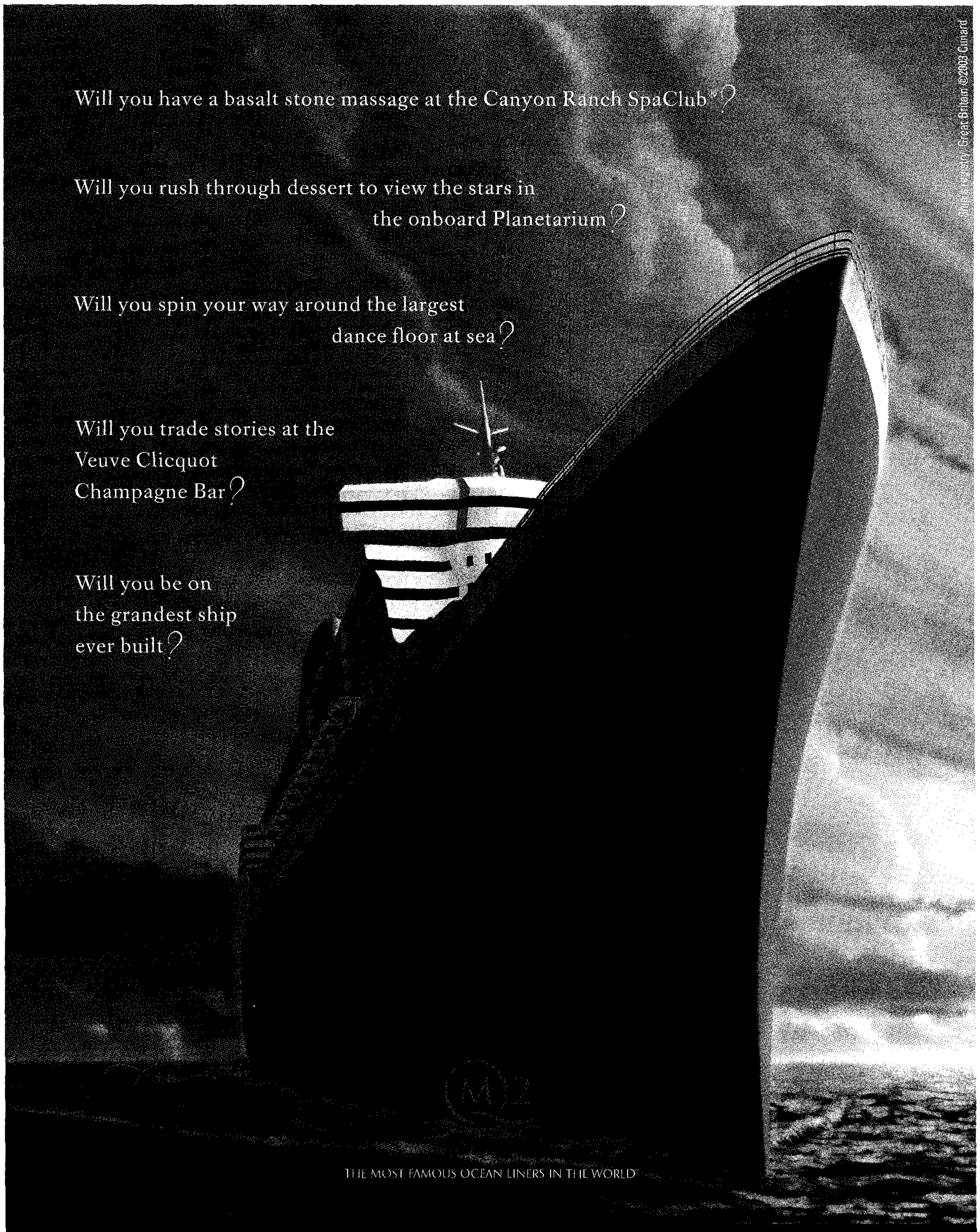
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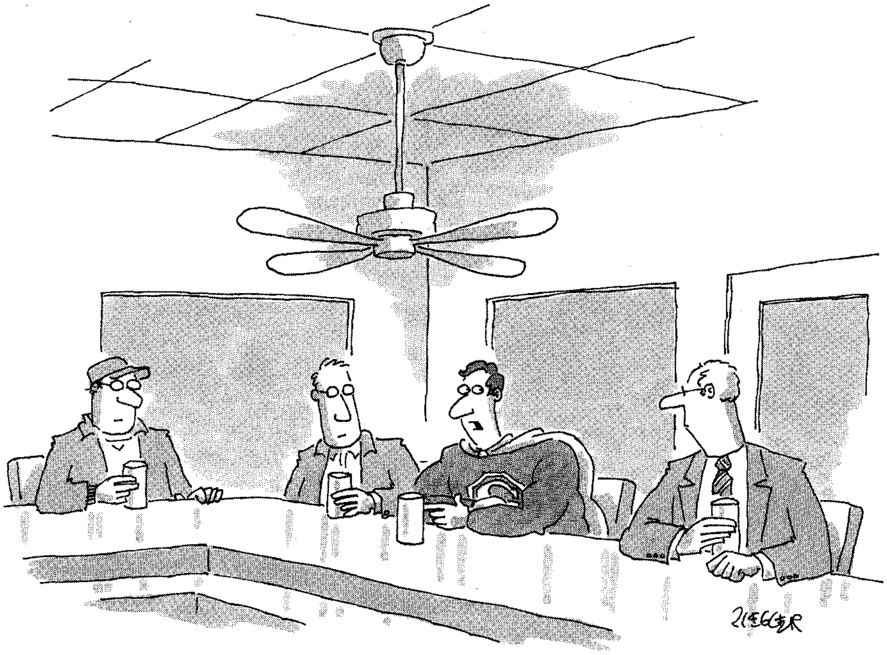
ing about the big bang. Bill and Hillary Clinton were in the audience; the President was scheduled to give his grand-jury testimony in the Monica Lewinsky matter the following morning. After the sermon, Hillary Clinton asked the minister where he had found that marvellous toy, saying she was looking for something to give Bill for his birthday. The minister offered his sphere, and Hillary passed it along to the President as they stood in the church. Outside, reporters were shouting questions about Monica Lewinsky. People watching the news that evening saw the President, ignoring the press, smiling cryptically as he stared into the Hoberman Sphere, slowly opening and closing it.

"We had no idea what had happened, because our daughter had been born on August 11th and we were oblivious to everything," Chuck says. "When we finally checked our messages, we heard all these people saying, 'Congratulations! You're famous!' "

Today, the Hoberman Sphere can be found everywhere, from science-museum gift shops to Wal-Mart and Toys R Us. The Hobermans run Hoberman Designs, which is based in a large, high-ceilinged loft in lower Manhattan, employs some twenty-five people, and does ten million dollars' worth of business a year. With nearly five million units sold, the sphere seems well on its way to becoming a classic toy, a twenty-first-century Slinky, and one of the few toys of recent vintage that are likely to be popular for a long time.



*"Anybody feel like arm-wrestling for shots?"*

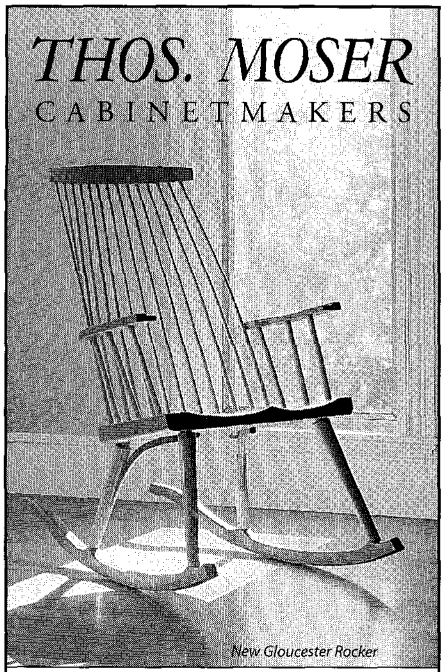
• •

That might have been the end of the story—and it would be a happy ending, more or less, like the story of Richard and Betty James, the inventors of the Slinky. (Richard abandoned the business and his family to join a religious cult in Bolivia, but his wife took over, moved the Slinky factory near the Jameses' home town of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, where it remains one of the town's largest employers, and made Slinky the world-famous toy that it is today. Now eighty-six, Betty James was inducted into the toy industry's Hall of Fame three years ago.)

But the toy industry has changed since the Second World War, and the difference between the Jameses' and the Hobermans' experience is one way of measuring just how much. Toymakers have always created toys that appealed to parents. The Erector set (1913) and Monopoly (1935) were products that parents could fondly believe were preparing their children to be builders and bankers. In the years after the war, though, toymakers began to make products that appealed exclusively to kids—toys that, in many cases, parents actively disliked, which was the principal source of their appeal. Toys like Rock'em Sock'em Robots, from 1966 (the ad's tagline, "You knocked my block off," taught me how to intimidate my younger brother), were the heirs to toys like Gooey Louie (1995): "Pick his nose until his brain explodes." Dolls such as Shirley Temple (1934) and Ginny (1951)—which, in their infantile appearance, were meant to elicit a maternal response from the children who played with them, and thus to begin preparing girls for motherhood—gave way to Barbie, a doll that was not the child's baby but her role model, the girl she longed to become.

John Brewster, a toy historian, has written of the early-twentieth-century toymakers, "They were marketing a particular social morality—one that stressed industry, probity, and individual endeavor." Play was the work of children, and building blocks and baby dolls were the tools that children used to become adults. But by the mid-nineteen-seventies toys had stopped trying to prepare children for anything other than a perpetual childhood. As David Elkind, a professor of child development at Tufts University and the author of the classic book "The Hurried Child," told me recently, "Many toys no longer perform a socializing function, as they used to. Toys are no different from any other consumer product—it's all about selling something."

This evolution in the design and marketing of toys marked the first time that children younger than twelve were explicitly targeted as consumers. The toy industry taught the makers of other kinds of consumer products that children were a potentially lucrative market, and that "aspirational age marketing" (selling the charm of feeling older) could be used to sell not only Barbie dolls but clothes, fast food, cosmetics, and electronics. Meanwhile, as fashion and trendiness became the driving concerns of the toy industry, the notion of a classic, a toy made to last, all but disappeared. (Even Binney & Smith, the makers of Crayola crayons since 1903, has seen the need to spruce up its choice of colors with Tickle Me Pink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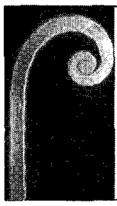
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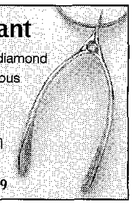
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and Macaroni and Cheese crayons.) For the contemporary toymaker, it is less important to invent one classic toy than it is to invent a toy that can be updated regularly with new colors, styles, models, and related products. "What retailers are impressed by is how much real estate you take up on the shelf," Anthony Gentile told me. "You want that whole wall of pink that you see when you get to the Barbie section." By inventing a timeless toy—one that didn't need to be improved—Chuck had limited himself to a tiny piece of retail real estate.

In the years since the introduction of the original sphere, the Hobermans have developed an entire line of spheres, from a twelve-inch, glow-in-the-dark model to a fifty-four-inch megasphere. They have also extended their patented linking concept to other toys, including Flip Outs (a sphere that changes color when you spin it) and Growbots (structures that transform into robotic-looking creatures). So far, none of Chuck's newer concepts have caught on like the original toy, but the Hobermans have high hopes for their new product for this holiday season, the Sonic Sphere.

The Hobermans introduced the toy at the 2003 American International Toy Fair, which was held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, in New York, last February. I went to the fair to see the toy for myself, joining the crowd of toy inventors, producers, distributors, packagers, retailers, and journalists who were poking around hundreds of exhibitors' booths. As I wandered the aisles of the vast space, I felt a sense of wonder at all the amazing things that toys can do these days (sing, dance, teach, work out), but, at the same time, I failed to find, among the many thousands of gewgaws, a single item that I wanted to take home to my four-year-old son. Toys must be two, often contradictory things in order to succeed. They have to be fun to play with, but they also have to look, while sitting on the shelf of the toy store, as if they would be fun to play with (the industry refers to this as "playability"), which, in many cases, results in an emphasis on superficial, attention-grabbing attributes. The only toys I saw at the fair which appealed to me were those I had played with as a child. (The toy industry has accommodated this desire, regularly bringing back toys in twenty-year cycles, like oldies on the radio, so that parents can duplicate their own Toyland experiences through their children. This season's retro toys include Strawberry Shortcake, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and My Little Pony, all of which were originally popular in the eighties.)

One reason so many sophisticated modern toys are less compelling than their humble forebears is the technology itself. Twenty years ago, the advent of electronics was hailed as "the greatest thing in our industry since the development of plastic," in the words of Arnold Greenberg, the former chairman of Coleco. This year, for the first time, more than half of the toys produced by United States toymakers will have an electronic chip inside. But so far technology has resulted in a striking dearth of good toys. Although this new generation of toys are advertised as "interactive," they're actually less interactive than traditional toys. Mitchel Resnick, a professor of learning research at the M.I.T. Media Lab who studies technology and toys, told me recently, "The question I ask about tech toys is, Does the technology keep the agency of play with the child, or does it shift the agency to the toy?" High-tech toys are so sophisticated that they're almost capable of playing by themselves—children aren't required.

I found the Hobermans on the mezzanine level of the Javits Center, under a large banner that said "Hoberman Designs." The sound of a steel drum was coming from a nearby exhibitor's booth. The music was supposed to be fun and wacky, but in the cavernous hall it sounded tinny and sad; Chuck said it was driving everybody crazy. "But the drummer has been paid for the whole day, so he's going to play," he added.

Chuck was dressed in a green suit, an orange shirt, and wire-rimmed glasses. He is tall, thin, and pale, and wears his red hair cut short. He was moving around the spacious Hoberman pavilion, meeting people, taking characteristically long strides, and yet his glad-handing seemed forced, not like the natural blarney I've encountered in other toy men. Chuck often looks slightly ill at ease in public, especially when he's on display as "the inventor." Carolyn, who was standing near her husband, appeared to be having more fun. "I like selling," she told me. "Chuck doesn't. He's too shy. But I really enjoy talking to people, hearing what they have to say."

Now forty-seven, Chuck runs the design and product-development side of the business, and Carolyn, fifty-one, oversees sales and intellectual-property protection. For Chuck, the greatest challenge has been finding a way to be successful in the toy business without betraying his artistic standards. He explained, "As an artist, my view was that one's work is the expression of an individual speaking to a viewer who is also an individual. And, as an inventor, I'd always loved the fact that the Patent Office only recognizes the inventors on the patent. So my mind-set as we started the business was that marketing was a kind of abuse of statistics. The population is divided into arbitrary categories, but an individual can never be a category." (When time allows, Chuck continues to seek opportunities to use his designs in artistic and architectural contexts; the mechanical curtain for the stage at the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, in Salt Lake City, was a Hoberman design.)

Chuck hated the whole notion of focus groups, which are ubiquitous in the toy industry. After all, the Hobermans' company had been founded not on a marketing gambit but on a mystical revelation that occurred while Chuck was meditating. "I didn't *want* to know why people liked the sphere," Chuck told me. "They liked it because I liked it, and that was enough."

The event that changed Chuck's thinking took place last year, when the Hobermans introduced their Discover Dome—a demisphere sheathed in origami-style folded paper that had fun facts about planets and dinosaurs printed on it. "We simply said, 'If we build it, they will come,' " Chuck recalled. "In retrospect, I think we all suffered from mass hypnosis." Their fellow-toymakers loved the ingenious domes, but kids weren't interested, and the price, $29.99, was too high for most parents. The Discover Dome bombed, and the Hobermans were stuck with thousands of unwanted toys.

As a result of the dome disaster, Chuck had another revelation. "I realized we had to get serious," he said. The company proclaimed 2003 "The Year of the Sphere" in its marketing literature, and Chuck's own image was incorporated into the brand (the packaging bears a photograph of his bespectacled red head). The Hobermans also began conducting focus groups—going to private and public schools around New York City and asking the kids what kind of toy they'd like to have. The kids said they wanted a toy with music and flashing lights—something "interactive"—so Chuck designed the Sonic Sphere.

Like many of the exhibitors at the toy fair, the Hobermans had hired actors to impersonate children playing with the product, in order to demonstrate how much fun it is. (Real children aren't permitted at the fair.) A woman was playing with the Sonic Sphere, rotating it to make different types of vocal and instrumental sounds emerge from the small orange plastic speaker in the center, and expanding and collapsing it to change the pitch and rhythm of the sounds. "So I'm hanging out here in my bedroom, and I can be my own d.j.!" the player playing at play said.

The Sonic Sphere was getting good reviews from other toymakers. Brooke Abercrombie, the president of Neurosmith, stopped by. "What a great way to translate motion into sound!" she said. But Chuck couldn't tell whether he had a hit on his hands. "It's not like designing the sphere," he said. "Instead of doing something that pleased me, and that, it turned out, kids loved, now we're trying to invent what we think kids will love—which is a very different stance."

In June, the Hobermans went to the Licensing International trade show, which was also held at the Javits Center. Unlike the toy fair, with its Saharan wastes of gimcrackery, at the licensing fair there are no physical objects—the trade is entirely in characters, narratives, and brands. Licensed toys—largely movie, music, and TV properties—which were once a tiny part of the toy industry, have steadily grown to encompass more

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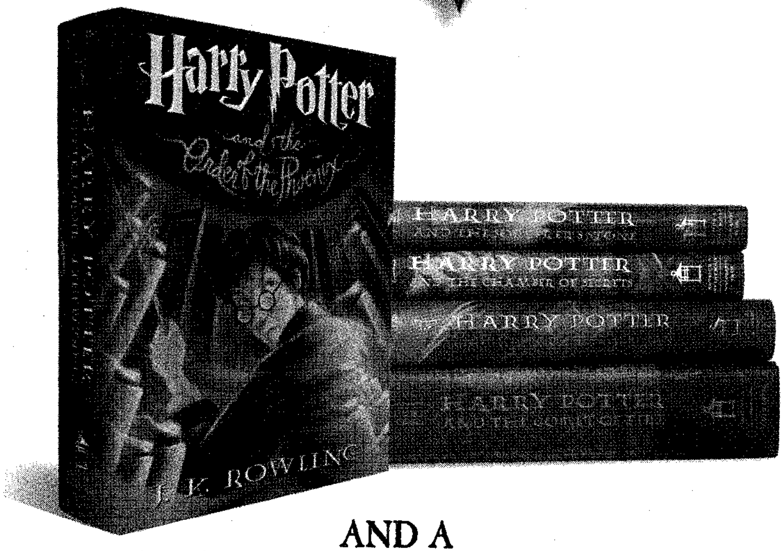
than thirty per cent of domestic toy sales. Movie tie-ins are declining, mainly because of the relative failure of the action figures that Hasbro produced for the new "Star Wars" trilogy, but tie-ins to popular TV characters like SpongeBob SquarePants are on the rise. (SpongeBob alone generated more than half a billion dollars' worth of licensed products last year.)

Toymakers use the word "toyetic" when they're discussing whether an entertainment property has what it takes to be a successful toy. The movie "Men in Black" spawned a lot of licenses, but it wasn't particularly toyetic because the characters are limited to wearing one color. The Harry Potter phenomenon, which also launched a tsunami of licensed products, hasn't proved to be particularly toyetic, either, perhaps because children would rather read the books than play with the toys.

At the beginning of his toymaking career, Chuck would never have considered taking a license—an arrangement under which the toymaker pays the entertainment company for the right to use its character (and often has to guarantee a minimum payment to the licensor, regardless of how many of the toys are sold). A licensed toy doesn't have to be particularly ingenious, because its appeal has less to do with what the toy does than with what it represents. The Hoberman Sphere is the antithesis of this kind of product: it's a toy that is what it does, and does what it is. The other drawback of licensed toys is that they deny children the most absorbing aspect of play: creating narratives. An ordinary cardboard packing box can be an enchanting toy if you imagine that it's a secret fort. But a toy that relies on a screen-based character or story doesn't require much imagination. Licensing is the fast-food version of toys—all you have to do is consume.

Nevertheless, like his view of focus groups, Chuck's opinion of licensing was evolving. "I feel this is American culture at its most distinctive," he said of the power of branding that was on display at Licensing International. "There is something very twenty-first-century about the idea that Lara Croft Tomb Raider represents a part of the global economy." At the Nickelodeon pavilion, he put on 3-D glasses and watched a "Sponge-

HARRY HOLIDAYS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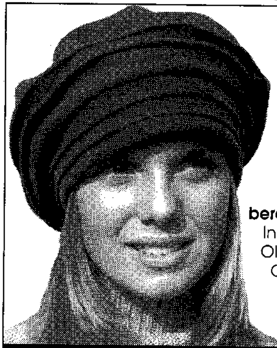
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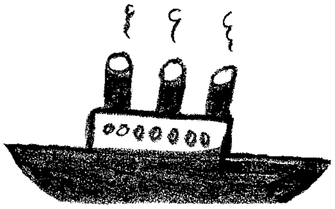
Bob" episode in the SpongeBob Tiki hut, and then had a talk with some people from Nickelodeon about the possibility of creating a Hoberman product based on the lovable yellow sponge, in time for "SpongeBob" the movie, which is due in theatres in the fall of 2004. Chuck was still hedging against a licensing deal—"What's the point, really?" he said to me gloomily—but Carolyn was open to the idea. "You know, we need to think big," she said. "Sometimes I imagine a Hoberland, a place where everything transforms. There's a Legoland; why not Hoberland?"

Now the toy-buying season is here again, and, if this season is like others in recent memory, parents will be lining up around the block, in the snow, outside Toys R Us, to get a toy that, of the thousands of new toys released this year, is the only toy that every child must have. The must-have toy is the apotheosis of the marketing of toys as fashion accessories. Will this year's must-have toy be Kasey the Kinderbot, a learning toy from Fisher-Price, which, in addition to helping kids read and write, also promises to teach them about manners, self-awareness, and emotions—all for $39.88 at Wal-Mart? (Parents will presumably be willing to spend more than twenty dollars for a toy that relieves them of the responsibility of parenting.) Will it be the rare P-Rico Plush doll, from the popular "Homies" series? Or will it be the Sonic Sphere, from Hoberman Designs?

There was no must-have toy last year, or the year before that; the last M.H.T. was Furby, a robotic feline, in 1998. Some industry analysts, like Kurt Barnard, the publisher of *Barnard's Retail Trend Report*, see this as evidence of the toy industry's continuing slippage in its competition with video games—PlayStation 2 and Xbox were the M.H.T.s of the past couple of years. "What the toy industry needs to figure out is how to make toys that are as compelling as video games," Barnard told me. "Until that happens, it's going to have problems." But another industry observer, Christopher Byrne, an independent toy analyst, sometimes known as "the Toy Guy," sees the decline of the must-have toy as a sign that toy buyers are becoming more rational about toys. "Parents have awakened to the fact that the toy they practically killed themselves to get may not have had the appeal that they expected," he told me recently. "I can't argue with more than forty-four million Furby toys sold, but how many of those did kids play with for a long time?"



The Sonic Sphere is at Wal-Mart and Toys R Us stores across the country, and the Hobermans are monitoring the weekly numbers. "The volume isn't huge, but the trend is encouraging," Chuck said last month. "So far, it looks good."

Chuck also mentioned, to my surprise, that he'd decided to take a SpongeBob license. "I know, I know, we're selling out," he said with a smile, seeing my raised eyebrows. "But the good thing about SpongeBob is that he can change his shape whenever he wants, which fits nicely into our aesthetic." He went on, "We're knocking around a couple of ideas, one of which is an exploding SpongeBob head, or maybe a head that turns into a pineapple."

Chuck spoke with a confidence that I had not heard from him before. By following his lifelong interest in transformations, I thought, he had himself been transformed—from an artist into a toymaker. But I was wrong about that. Not long after we spoke, Chuck changed his mind and dropped the SpongeBob idea. "A SpongeBob toy might have made us some money, but it just wasn't what we're really about," he explained. "I have to believe that there really is a group of people—regular people shopping at Toys R Us and Wal-Mart—who share this basic wonder that I have when they touch a plastic linkage that somehow embodies the geometries that underlie natural structures, regardless of whether SpongeBob or Spider-Man's face is on the toy. There's no point in making a throwaway item just because it might sell. There's got to be more to what we do than that." ♦

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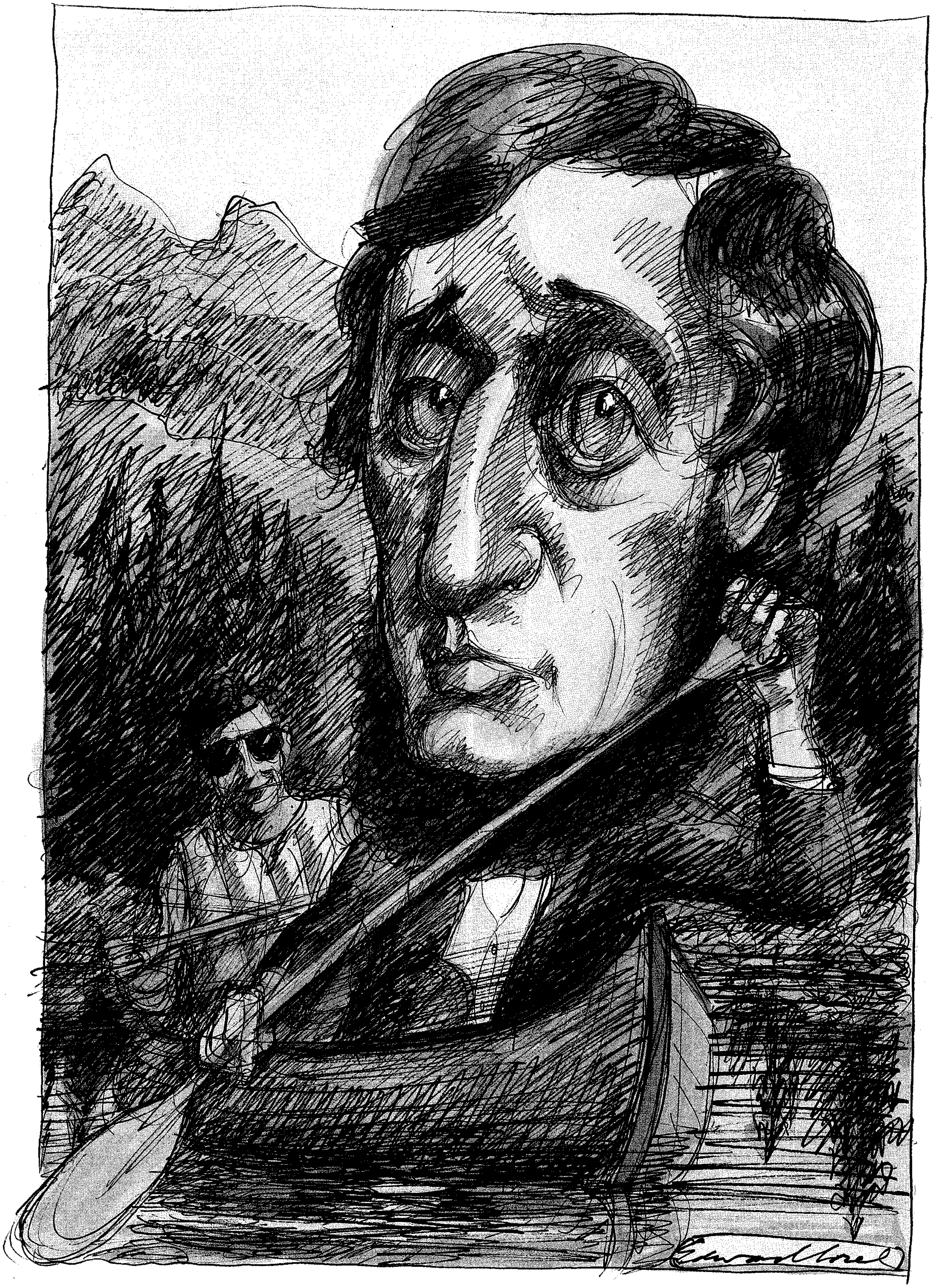

Edward Sorel

## OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

# 1839/2003

*Five days on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.*

### BY JOHN McPHEE

On the thirty-first of August, 1839, John and Henry Thoreau—brothers, aged twenty-five and twenty-two—set out from their home in Concord, Massachusetts, in a small skiff on the Sudbury River. They were bound for Hooksett, New Hampshire, about fifty-five water miles north. The boat was fifteen feet long, styled like a dory, and new. They had made it in a week. They carried two sets of oars and a sail. On the thirty-first of August, 2003, with a college roommate who has long lived in Concord, I set out in a sixteen-foot Old Town canoe at a put-in site on the Sudbury which is Thoreau scholars' best guess as the place where the Thoreaus took off. It is now the back yard of a couple named Kate Stout and Pete Funkhouser, who live at the intersection of Thoreau and Main. Across Main is the house where Henry David Thoreau died. He and John grew up in a now long-gone dwelling thought to have been very nearby. John was his brother's best friend, perhaps his only close one. After nicking himself with a razor, John died of tetanus at the age of twenty-seven. "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," Henry's first book, rehearses their journey as a species of memorial, the fact notwithstanding that Thoreau never mentions his brother's name.

On August 31, 1839, as the brothers prepare to launch, "a warm drizzling rain" rains all morning, so the Thoreaus delay their departure until the "mild afternoon." On August 31, 2003, a cool and sunlit day, we were on the Sudbury soon after breakfast. In addition to houses with sloping lawns, Concord Academy was off to our right. Henry Thoreau founded an earlier Concord Academy, in 1838. John taught there. Across a swamp on the left was Nashawtuc Hill, but in 2003 we could see neither school nor hill from the tree-screened Sudbury. The water was slow and smooth. In half a mile, we came to Egg Rock, an outcrop of granite gneiss, as impressive in its size as in words inscribed in the rock: "On the hill at the meeting of these rivers and along the banks lived the owners of Musketaquid before the white men came." The rivers Sudbury and Assabet join at Egg Rock to form—as Thoreau tells us in the first words of his book—"the Musketaquid, or Grass-ground River." It had been renamed Concord River, but "it will be Grass-ground River as long as grass grows and water runs here," he says, suggesting a viewpoint not widespread in his time. Far into his text, he recalls boatmen, in low water, mowing the grass of the Concord River as if it were a hayfield, the better to deliver their freight.

Under light, steady current, the bent river grass pointed us downstream, and through the oaken pilings of the Old North Bridge. On the right bank—the British side of the bridge as the redcoats faced the Colonial militia—was an obelisk dated 1836. Off the other end, in bronze, was the Minuteman sculpture by Daniel Chester French, whose sitting Lincoln sits in the Lincoln Memorial. Inscribed below the Minuteman was the least obscure stanza of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Concord Hymn," which Thoreau quotes and then follows with a couple of pages of his own verse. The "Concord Hymn" was first performed in 1837, when the obelisk was dedicated. Henry Thoreau was in the choir, singing. He was a senior at Harvard, days away from his graduation. John was in all likelihood present as well. The choir sang:

> By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
> Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
> Here once the embattled farmers stood
> And fired the shot heard round the world.

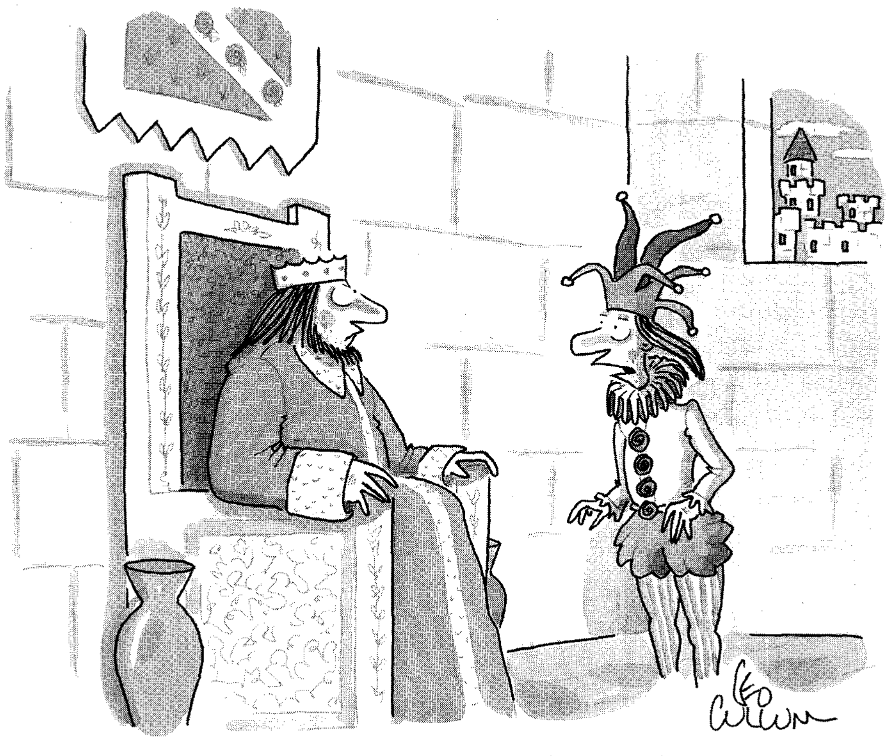
The Thoreaus carried guns and fired them to signal their departure from town. In his book, Thoreau refers to Emerson—his mentor, his model, his benefactor, his employer—only as "a Concord poet." In Thoreau's wanderings north of the Moosehead—which resulted in "The Allegash and East Branch," the first recreational American canoe trip reported to the future—Edward Hoar, a Concord neighbor, was with him all the way, and in nearly ten thousand words was mentioned only as "my companion" or "my friend." This was, of course, not churlishness on the author's part but a diffident custom practiced in his time, as if it were ordered by "The Concord Manual of Style," or, for that matter, in the way that the modern New York *Times* seems to insist that the first-person pronoun be swaddled as "a visitor." In "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," John Thoreau is immortalized as "the other," although it is not always clear who "the other" is. At dusk on the day they reach Hooksett, "one of us" goes up the bank to look for a farmhouse "where we might replenish our stores" while "the other remained cruising about the stream, and exploring the opposite shores" for a place to stay the night. It's always "one" or "the other," never "me" and "my brother." But this time Henry is trapped in his own terminology, as, in the past tense and from the author's perspective in the rowboat, "the other voyageur returned from his inland expedition," and we know that it

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDWARD SOREL

*The river's "wild and noble sights," Thoreau wrote, are "such as they who sit in parlors never dream of."*

was John who replenished the stores, getting precious little credit for it.

Not being as mannerly as Henry David Thoreau or the *Times*, I don't mind telling you that my companion on the Concord River was Dick Kazmaier, who, after that first day, bid me farewell, yielding his place to my son-in-law Mark Svenvold, who went up the Merrimack with me to Hooksett. The Thoreau brothers reached Hooksett on September 4th, as did we, but along the way we stayed in different places than they did. Their first campsite was on an island in Billerica seven miles from Concord. At the end of the second day, they pitched their tent in Tyngsborough, on the Merrimack, a short distance below the ferry there. A short distance below Tyngsborough Bridge, where the ferry was, we slept higher up the bank, in a resort hotel called Stonehedge. On September 2nd, they rowed upstream into New Hampshire and on to the mouth of Penichook Brook, a little north of Nashua, where we arrived a full day ahead of them, taking out at Nashua's Greeley Park on September 1st. The difference was caused by an altered structure of the journey. The Thoreaus were travelling not only on two rivers but also on two commercial waterways. At the falls of Billerica, eleven miles below their home, they intersected the Middlesex Canal, which ran from salt water in Boston to the Merrimack at Middlesex (now part of the city of Lowell), "and as we did not care to loiter in this part of our voyage, while one ran along the tow-path drawing the boat by a cord, the other kept it off the shore with a pole, so that we accomplished the whole distance in little more than an hour." The whole distance was six miles, and by 2003 it included, among other things, the multipetalled cloverleaf where I-495 crosses U.S. 3 and also connects with an interstate spur. On the Billerica side of that cloverleaf, north and south of Brick Kiln Road, you can walk nearly two miles through deep woods along the old canal, which has aged there for a century and a half untouched and unrestored, thirty feet wide, water still in it, but low under green algal scum. White pines are there, tall enough to be the masts of ships. Honeysuckle, huckleberries, birches, oaks. In the low and distant hum of internal combustion, the quiet path is precisely the one the brothers used with their cord and their pole. In Lowell, nearing the Merrimack, the canal emerges from woods and, conjoining Black Brook, becomes the water hazard that divides the second and third fairways of Mount Pleasant Golf Club, John and Henry all but visible hauling their skiff from the second tee and the third green to the second green and the third tee among the putting golfers, the swinging golfers, the riding golfers in their rolling carts.



*"I just thought that a horrific, humiliating defeat at the hands of the French, plus time, equalled comedy."*

Mark Svenvold and I—on September 1st—started out early in the day on the Merrimack in Lowell, directly opposite the place where three stair-step locks, in the afternoon of the same date, lowered the Thoreaus into the river. If we had it easier than they did, skipping over by necessity the Middlesex Canal, they had a softer time of it in New Hampshire. In 1826, a dam was built at Pawtucket Falls, in the heart of Lowell, Massachusetts, and, as Thoreau reports, "the influence of the Pawtucket Dam is felt as far up as Cromwell's Falls," in New Hampshire, five miles above Nashua. (The word "falls," then as now, was applied not only to free-falling water but also to rapids.) The Thoreaus bypassed Cromwell's Falls by means of a canal-and-lock system on the west side of the river. In the eleven miles between Cromwell's Falls and Amoskeag Falls, in Manchester, the Merrimack ran (and still runs) on its post-Pleistocene gradient, white in its bouldered rapids. Above Cromwell's and below Amoskeag, the heavier falls were circumvented by seven lock systems collectively known as the Union Canal. The Thoreaus, of course, whisked their boat upstream through the whole of the Union Canal, rowing, yes, against the currents of the pools, but everywhere relieved of the rigors of the rapids. Things would not be so for us. The Union Canal is rubble. Scouting our trip by car in midsummer, I felt discouragement looking down into the massive boulderfields laced with white water in all those miles approaching Manchester. I doubted that we could make much progress there.

Scarcely a quarter of a mile below the Old North Bridge, the Concord River enters the Great Meadows, which, in Thoreau's words, "like a broad moccasin print, have levelled

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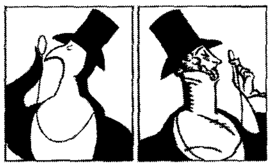

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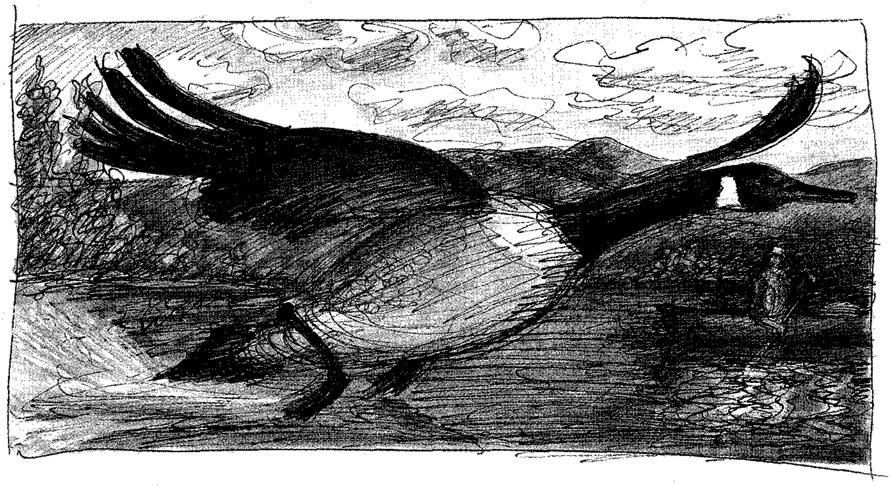
Vista has a street named
wondered how the residents pronounce that. Thoreau scholars generally accent the first syllable of his name. Elizabeth Witherell, the editor-in-chief of The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau, had told me that people around Concord seem to say "THERR-oh," as in "I gave it a thorough cleaning." I knocked on the door at No. 22 Thoreau. Two slats of a Venetian blind came slowly apart. A woman of upper-middle years informed me that she was not about to open the door. I shouted back through the glass, asking about an island in the river behind her house. "I never heard of one!" she shouted back. Would she mind telling me how she pronounces the name of her street? "Thor-OH!" she shouted, with a bold stroke on the "OH."

"A name pronounced is the recognition of the individual to whom it belongs," Henry Thoreau says, near the end of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers." "He who can pronounce my name aright . . . is entitled to my love and service." His name is everywhere in Thoreau country. At the foot of Lock Street in Nashua you approach the Merrimack through Thoreau's Landing, a spread of nature-colored condos—handsome, homogenous, extensive.

Sunday morning and "the air was so elastic and crystalline that it had the same effect on the landscape that a glass has on a picture. . . . We were uncertain whether the water floated the land, or the land held the water." In 2003, the Concord was similar for us that Sunday afternoon. Blue herons lined it like gargoyles. Who knows what pious thoughts they were thinking. Thoreau says that on this day "the fishes swam more staid and soberly, as maidens go to church," and "the frogs sat meditating, all Sabbath thoughts, summing up their week." Like the Thoreaus' dory, our canoe moved through flat-calm water that reflected the surrounding world. Thoreau says, "It required some rudeness to disturb with our boat the mirror-like surface of the water . . . for only Nature may exaggerate herself." The water we rudely broke with our paddles was as clear as the air and the reflection. Moreover, in eleven miles on the Concord we saw one beer can (afloat), one orange-and-white plastic barrel (in the alders), and no other flotsam or jetsam. The Clean Water Act of 1972 was among the highest legislative accomplishments of the twentieth century. It owed more than a little to thought set in motion by Henry David Thoreau.

Just as he describes it, the Concord narrows dramatically and shallows out over a "yellow pebbly bottom" as it approaches the falls in Billerica, where the Thoreaus went off on the Middlesex Canal and where Kaz and I were to rendezvous with my wife, Yolanda Whitman, in her Odyssey. To let her know that we were in Billerica and when we would be landing, Kaz produced a cell phone, waved it in the air, and said, "Henry David couldn't do this!"



Where the brothers entered the Merrimack, whatever is left of the three locks that took them down to the river is buried beside Advance Auto Parts, 1-800 Rent-a-Car, the Tandoori Grill, and the Asian Pacific Buffet. The remains are under the Sterling warehouse for North American Van Lines and the rails of the Boston & Maine. Across Broadway from all those historic places is Hadley Field, with its baseball diamond, its children's playground, its skateboard park, and its low stone marker as the route of the Middlesex Canal. Coming through the park, the canal went right through the warehouse and stair-stepped down to the river.

On September 1st, at seven-fifty in the morning, Mark Svenvold and I started off in a light rain, due west up the Merrimack. Starting up the Merrimack, Thoreau says, "We now felt as if we were fairly launched on the ocean-stream of our voyage," and he compares the village harbors in that reach of the river to the harbors of Venice, Syracuse, and Rhodes. The Merrimack there is a thousand feet wide and subject to the winds if not of an ocean at least of a good-sized lake. I hate fighting headwinds, so I was grateful for the calm gray overcast, the rain that diminished to mist. We would be paddling upstream about forty miles, at least twenty-five per cent of it with no help from the pooling influence of dams. Mark is six feet three, in his early forties, athletic. In this endeavor, I preferred him to his wife or, certainly, my wife. This wasn't my first rodeo. Mark also has the high fluency and ironic humor of someone else who went up this river, long ago. He is a poet, a creative-writing professor, and the author of "Elmer McCurdy," a nonfiction book in which he easily bests the challenge that his central figure is a corpse.

Lowell, which had more than a hundred thousand people by 2003, already had twenty thousand in 1839. For Thoreau, this was not a wilderness trip; these were not the woods of Maine. It was a journey up a minor American Ruhr, partly developed and partly under construction, ever more nascent with miles north. On the riverbanks, rails were being laid as he rowed. In his book, when he calls Lowell "the city of spindles and Manchester of America" he is not referring to the ambitious village thirty miles upstream. Nor is he above a borrowed thought. In his duffel, he had John Hayward's "The New England Gazetteer" (published earlier in 1839), which describes Lowell as "the American Manchester."

The Merrimack is formed in central New Hampshire by the conjunction of the Pemigewasset and the Winnipesaukee (Thoreau's Winnepisiogee) and flows pretty much due south to the Great Bend at Chelmsford, where it turns east for Lowell and the ocean. The Thoreaus, taking their "nooning," sat on sand under an apple tree and ate wild plums "opposite the Glass-house village" here at the Great Bend.

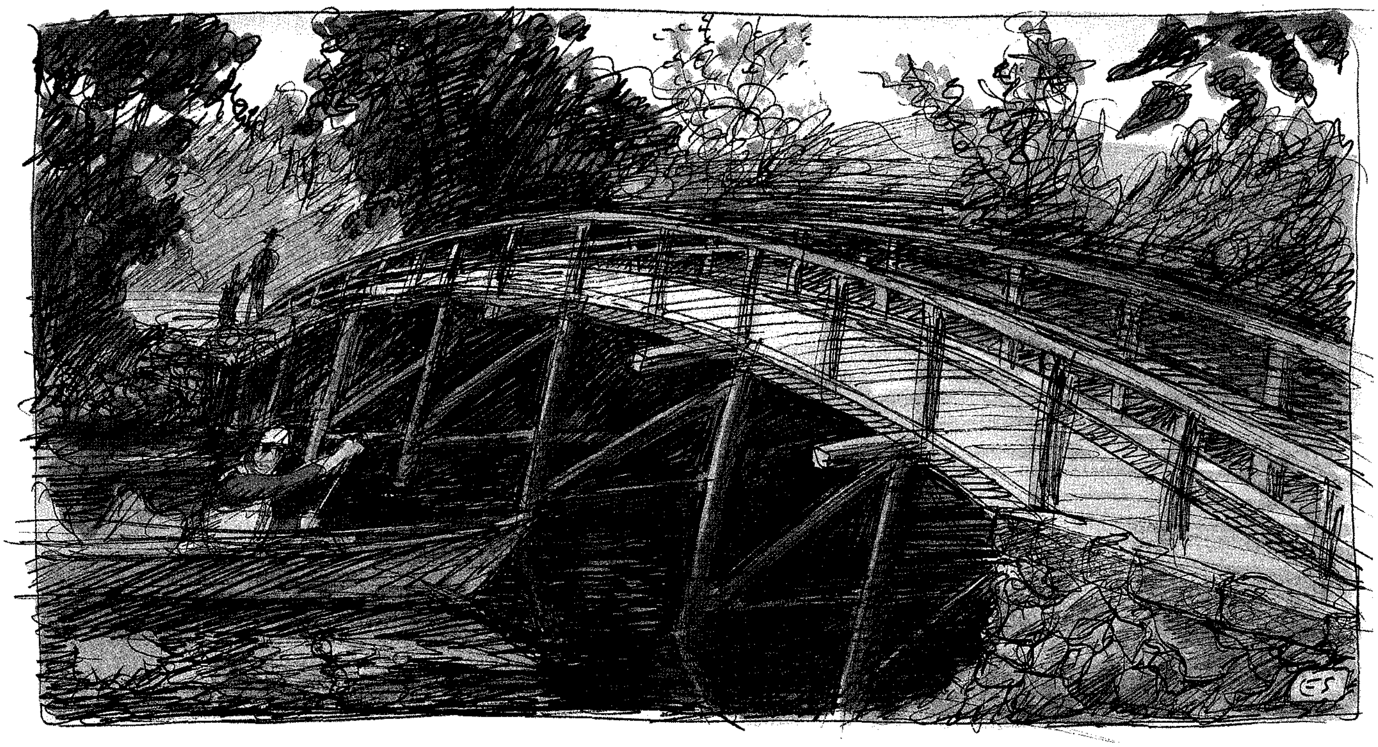
We turned the corner, headed north, and before nine in the morning were entering the channel behind Tyng's Island—the Pennacook Confederacy's phonetic Wickasee, Thoreau's Wicasuck, "a favorite residence of the Indians," home of the sachem Wannalancet, son of Passaconaway. Thoreau repeatedly brings up the history and predicament of Native Americans from the seventeenth century forward, and what has become of their possessions, as he does here. Yet he might have been slow to understand the scene we came into now: men riding in little carts and seeming to kill things on the ground. In the mouth of the channel, paddling, we watched them, to our left, approach and putt on the third green. This was Vesper Country Club, dating from 1875, where Harry Vardon, who would win six British Open Championships, slept in a tent in 1900, got up, and set the course record. Joe Kirkwood played here. Walter Hagen played here. Vesper's first champion (1895) was Austin Chadwick, destined to become president of the Lowell Five Cent Savings Bank. The fourth hole, par 3, plays over the channel, its green on the mainland. As we went by, the golfers we had been watching were teeing off. A guy hit a shot into the water right in front of us, as if he were shelling a frigate. Running three-quarters of a mile before rejoining the main river, the channel was generally a hundred and fifty feet wide. Crossed by two small bridges, it resembled a canal, which it had once been, when the dam in Lowell was less high and a lock lifted boats circumventing the rapids on the far side of Wickasee Island; but that was before the Thoreaus' time. In Henry's book, they row straight up the silenced rapids.

On their fifth day, above Amoskeag Falls, in Manchester, the brothers pass a ten-foot obeliscal monument to the family of Major General John Stark. It "commands a prospect several miles up and down the Merrimack," Thoreau reports, and goes on to say, "It suggested how much more impressive in the landscape is the tomb of a hero than the dwellings of the inglorious living." Then, in purest hermitspeak, he asks, "Who is most dead,—a hero by whose monument you stand, or his descendants of whom you have never heard?" Five hundred feet up the bank, the monument is still there, veiled in vegetation and not visible from the river.

Stark died in 1822 at the age of ninety-three. While Thoreau notes that Stark "commanded a regiment of the New Hampshire militia at the battle of Bunker Hill; and fought and won the battle of Bennington in 1777," Thoreau seems not to have been aware that every automobile in New Hampshire would bear on its license plates the first four words of this apothegm from the General: "Live free or die; death is not the worst of evils." In any case, Thoreau does not quote it. Instead, looking up at the Stark memorial, he smolders with indignant irony, saying, "The graves of Passaconaway and Wannalancet are marked by no monument on the bank of their native river." That is no longer strictly true. In Litchfield, on the east bank of the Merrimack about halfway between Nashua and Manchester—where the Thoreaus saw acres of elms and maples six inches high—is Passaconaway Country Club.

As the Thoreaus rowed past Wannalancet's Wickasee, in 1839, a couple of men asked them for a ride off the island, which Henry and John, freighted low, declined to provide. "As we glided away," Henry would recall, "we could still see them far off over the water, running along the shore and climbing over the rocks and fallen trees like insects." Or golfers.

At their campsite below the Tyngsborough ferry, they "hung a lantern to the tent pole," spread their buffalo hides on the grass, and read the gazetteer, "our Navigator, and from its bald natural facts extracted the pleasure of poetry." They carried potatoes and melons: "We threw our rinds into the water for the fishes to nibble." Above Nashua at the mouth of the Penichook, they had more boiled cocoa for supper. At Coos Falls, below Manchester, they inadvertently pitched their tent in a trail used by masons who were working on the lock there. Early the following morning, while they were rolling up their buffaloes, the masons came by on their way to work. This was the only instance, Thoreau says, when anyone saw them in any of their campsites. Try that in century twenty-one. In Hooksett, when "the other" went to the farmhouse for food, he came back with "a loaf of home-made bread, and musk and water-melons for dessert." In Tyngsborough, when Mark and I went up the bank to the Stonehedge Inn, leaving behind the Thoreau brothers with their melon rinds and cocoa, we perused a menu that included, sans punctuation, "Herb Crusted Cod with a Organic Baby Vegetable and Wild Rice Casserole Maple Smoked Bacon Reduction." I had one of those. The wine list was only a little shorter than the Boston Area telephone directory, and might have appealed to a British banker. You could have a 1996 Meursault for $176, a 1997 Gevrey-Chambertin for $240, a 1984 Robert Mondavi Reserve for $245, a 1953 Château Mouton-Rothschild for $1,585, a 1947 Château Latour for $3,400, or a 1945 Margaux for $3,600. Laid down in the Stonehedge cave were ninety-six thousand bottles of wine. In the center of the dining room was a glass tower of recumbent wines that may have been an architectural reference to the glass column of visible books in the Beinecke Library at Yale. Under the Stonehedge portico was a lingering black Jaguar, evidently a prop.



"We occasionally rested in the shade of a maple or a willow," says the younger

Thoreau, "and drew forth a melon for our refreshment, while we contemplated at our leisure the lapse of the river and of human life." One night, "by a deep ravine, under the skirts of a pine wood," a high wind arose. "The pines murmured, the water rippled, and the tent rocked a little, but we only laid our ears closer to the ground, while the blast swept on to alarm other men. . . . Long before daylight we ranged abroad with hatchet in hand. . . . Then with our fire we burned up a portion of the loitering night, while the kettle sang its homely strain to the morning star." Thoreau had difficulty in his search for a publisher for this book. He eventually published it himself. After seven hundred and six copies were returned to him unsold, he said, "I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself." From the Penichook campsite, after the wind subsided, he and John took off upstream in the dark at 3 A.M. in an enveloping river fog.

At the Tyngsborough ferry, the Thoreaus see "a gig in the gray morning, in the mist," and "children with their two cents done up in paper." The children's fare was two cents. Off the west end of the modern bridge is the Henry Farwell House, dating from 1705, where English proprietors serve cheese scones, crustless mini-sandwiches, and, in bone china, teas that come out from under cozies. Farwell started the ferry service in 1809. The old town hall across from the Farwell House was five years old when the Thoreaus went by, in 1839. Neighboring houses, still there, date from 1808 and 1790.

Svenvold and I went under the Tyngsborough Bridge soon after nine in the morning, hoping to complete the stretch from Lowell to upper Nashua by nightfall. We underestimated what we could do. At ten, we came to a sign on the right—"Welcome to Hudson, New Hampshire." A few more strokes and I looked over my shoulder. Nothing welcoming there. Massachusetts didn't care whether you died free or lived in California. The river was peaceful, mostly silent, secluded. From time to time, we heard the surf of highways we could not see. We saw kingfishers along the Merrimack, and blue herons, the fisher kings. Eight Canada geese came in, splat, for belly-flopping crash landings—the only kind of landing they can manage. We saw a shopping cart, a truck muffler, a dolly, dead sweepers full of Styrofoam debris. A sweeper is a tree that is still connected to the shore but has fallen into the river. Current moves flotsam into the sweeper, which collects the flotsam. The Merrimack had its share of foul sweepers, but, over all, the river was remarkably clean, the sight we now came to notwithstanding.

Far ahead and near the west bank, a small geyser was shooting white water straight upward in the otherwise flat river. The eruption was only a couple of feet high but in that apparently motionless riverscape it had the focal effect of a natural phenomenon. It drew us toward it—the ultimate orifice of the Nashua Wastewater Treatment Facility, spinning great concentric swirls of white foam on the river, like half an acre of cappuccino. This hideous sight was enough to frighten a shipful of Vikings, as Mark Svenvold was prepared to affirm. The discharge smelled like laundry detergent and chlorine, nothing worse, but in this place more than anywhere else—including all the rocks and rapids to come—I preferred that the canoe remain upright. The effluent seemed to disperse quickly and the water downstream had been clear as we approached—peculiarly, the signature of Thoreau and the environmental movement. In communities along the river, some three hundred thousand people drink the treated Merrimack.

Passing under a pair of high bridges, we came to the mouth of the Nashua River not long after noon. Turning into it, we pulled up the canoe on a sandy beach among boulders, and, under red maples, ate Stonehedge-prepared club sandwiches laced with avocado. The Nashua was clear, smooth, and fast—not white water but a firm current coming down through a railroad bridge whose bowstring trusses enhanced a lovely scene. The Nashua River, near its mouth, bisects the city, flourishing three oxbow bends before debouching into the Merrimack. The Thoreaus, after passing under a covered bridge and arriving at the Nashua, were not much interested. Henry praises the tributary for its "elm-shaded meadows" at Groton, but says that "near its mouth it is obstructed by falls and factories, and did not tempt us to explore it." It tempted

## SERENADE

I wake to the cracked plate
of moon being thrown

across the room—
that'll fix me

for trying sleep.
Lately even night

has left me—
now even the machine

that makes the rain
has stopped sending

the sun away.
It is late,

or early, depending—

who's to say.
Who's to name

these ragged stars, this
light that waters

down the insomniac dark
before I down

it myself.
Sleep, I swear

there's no one else—
raise me up

in the near-night
& set me like

a tin toy to work,
clanking in the bare

broken bright.

—*Kevin Young*

Mark and me, and we took off for the public library, digging hard against deceptive currents. A week earlier, for training purposes, we had gone a mile and a half against the upper Delaware at a stage near flood. But this was more difficult, possibly because the Nashua was shallow and we were not poling. Working off the avocado, we got around a meander bend and under the 101 bridge, almost a mile up. Then we came to a small island, beyond which were another railroad bridge and a dam. On our left was the spire of St. Casimir's Catholic Church, dark-red brick, 1857. St. Casimir's is on Temple Street near Scripture. Scripture is one-way. On our right was a brick mill, fourteen years old when the Thoreaus went by, with three large arches standing in the river, framing a pitch-black watery cavern. We fought up past the arches to the top of the island, where we decided to let the Nashua return us to the Merrimack.

A two-mile digression is not a rarity in Thoreau. He is, to a fare-thee-well, an author with the courage to digress. In this same reach of the Merrimack, while slicing his midday melons, he mentions that they are "a fruit of the east," and his thoughts go off, his pencil with them, to "Arabia, Persia, and Hindostan, the lands of contemplation and dwelling-places of the ruminant nations." He visits a lot of ruminant nations—their faiths, literatures, and philosophies—and returns reliably after a detour of six thousand words. On the Sunday morning that he hauls the dory through the Middlesex Canal, he passes a church, close to the Merrimack, whose congregation pours out as the brothers go by. This triggers five thousand words on comparative religion before the dory is lowered to the river. Had he been a candidate for employment in the pulpit of that church, the congregation might not have been eager to hire him. Jesus Christ, he remarks, "taught mankind but imperfectly how to live." "The church is a sort of hospital for men's souls, and as full of quackery." On the Merrimack approaching Tyngsborough, he refers to God as "the Scene-shifter."

One of his consultations with "The New England Gazetteer" gives rise to six thousand words of literary theory. "Books of natural history aim commonly to be hasty schedules, or inventories of God's property, by some clerk," he writes. Literary criticism is "the art of navigation by those who have never been out of sight of land." You can all but hear a student shout, "Go, T!"

Some of his digressions repay in brevity whatever the long ones may have borrowed. Paddling under an overhanging tree a few miles below Nashua, he goes into a high-density set piece of two hundred and thirty-five words about the species *Tilia americana* (American basswood), from which people have made matting, ropes, shoes, nets, cloth, roofing, bucklers, baskets, paper, cradles, sugar, medicine, gunpowder, and the "sounding-boards of piano-fortes." The wood is remarkable for its "toughness and flexibility," he says, and, withal, for being unusually light—as Mark and Kaz and I could testify after moving our canoe fifty-some miles with basswood paddles in our hands.

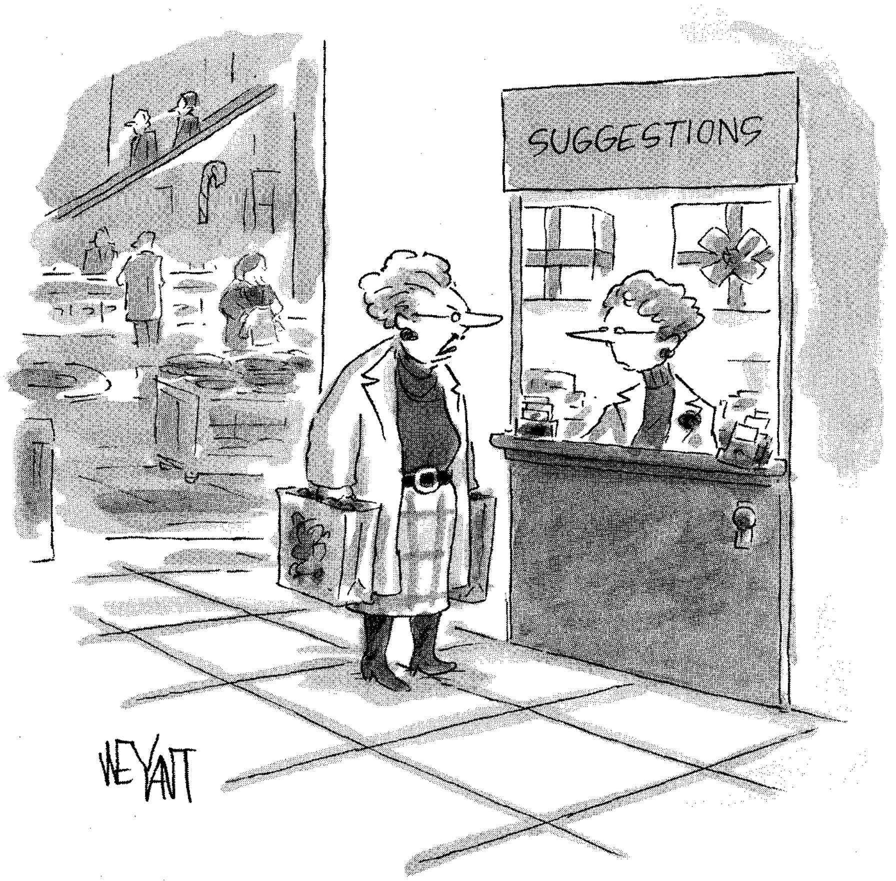
The pitted rocks of Amoskeag Falls inspire in Thoreau five hundred words on the notable potholes of New England, and they in turn lead him to outline his understanding of geomorphology, which somehow leads him into the ramifications of Roman history. The scholar Linck Johnson calls these patterns a "complex weave." The first image that came to my mind was a string of lights—or any linear structure with things hanging on it, like a heavily loaded clothesline. In the magisterial Emerson, Johnson finds the aptest image. Emerson described the narrative of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" as "a very slender thread for such big beads & ingots as are strung on it."

Thoreau's structure would be almost pure free association were it not for the river reeling him back in. The writing is commentary, editorial, philosophical, homiletic—defying generic assignment. Near Reeds Ferry, he remarks, en passant, "We are double-edged blades, and every time we whet our virtue the return stroke straps our vice."

By rough word count, most of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" is ninety per cent digression and ten per cent narrative. Near the end, the ratio is even more lopsided. Thoreau seems anxious to be done with the rivers, to get the geography out of the way, and bring the piece of writing to its oblique but cardinal purpose: a nine-thousand-word final digression, on friendship. Elizabeth Witherell, whose scholarly publishing project The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau was once on the Princeton campus and is now at Northern Illinois University, has pointed out to me, "John died in January, 1842. His younger brother decided to memorialize him in a book in which he would combine an account of the trip with philosophical observations and meditations." And she went on to say that "Thoreau looks first at and then through the landscape"; he is demonstrating "the timelessness at the heart of change."

Thoreau did not begin writing "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" until 1845. That is what he was doing in the hut at Walden Pond, which he built on Emerson's land. He also began "Walden" there, which he published in 1854. These were his only two books to appear in his lifetime. In 1839, he had not rowed to New Hampshire with intent to write a book. In the fourteen volumes of his journal, three pages derive from the trip on the rivers when he was twenty-two. After he died, at the age of forty-four, pieces he had contributed to *Sartain's Union Magazine*, *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* were collected by Ticknor & Fields as "Cape Cod" and "The Maine Woods." "Typically he would make a trip, write a lecture, lecture again, making changes, and eventually publish the lecture in a magazine," Witherell says. "There is no notebook from the Concord-Merrimack trip. He did write some things on the trip, because he says so."

In a light but steady rain, Mark Svenvold and I started out from Greeley Park, Nashua, around nine in the morning on September 2nd, six hours later than the Thoreaus, on September 3rd, left their nearby campsite at Penichook Brook and rowed off in the pitch-black fog. The banks of the Merrimack characteristically rise sheer for ten or so vertical feet before levelling out and then rising again steeply to a second terrace. Just about where the Thoreaus camped, a bit downstream from the mouth of the brook, we saw two small concrete tombstones, scarcely a foot high, on the shelf between the terraces. Mark somehow got himself up the ten feet, and read the inscriptions from the metal plates on the tombstones: "HENRY 85-95," "RILEY 86-95." Henry? An Airedale, possibly. A cat. A gerbil. A parrot. A python. In the windless rain, we proceeded on, where Thoreau, on this "calm and beautiful day," saw potato fields, pastures, corn, rye, oats, and "few houses." From the Merrimack, "the country appeared much more wild and primitive than to the traveller on the neighboring roads. The river is by far the most attractive highway." He could say that again in the twenty-first century. High behind the Merrimack's western flank was Route 3—north-south, like the river—a plastic strip mall running from one New Hampshire city to the next, a fast-food industrial complex. We rarely heard it and never glimpsed it. The Merrimack, bordered in its densities of trees, was a discrete world.



*"What do you get the man who appreciates nothing?"*

About two miles above Penichook Brook we came to Cromwell's Falls. The impoundment of water behind Pawtucket Dam, at Lowell, is now said to extend to Reeds Ferry, five miles up from Cromwell's Falls, but I would not describe as impounded a riffle of water gurgling over a ledge. It was an alluring sight at last to see the real river with its clothes off. There was nothing small about it—eight hundred feet wide, with a cluster of islands on the eastern side. Near the west bank was the massive stonework of the lock and canal that the Thoreaus and the floating freight carriers of their time had used to circumvent the ledge. Completed in 1815, it is one of the two best preserved components of the canal-and-lock systems on the Merrimack. Others are little more than big perches of cut stone strewn along the edge of the river. The lock doors, of course, were wooden and perishable, but some of the remains include hinges. The guide wall stood on the easterly side. Opposite was a large part of the long wall that led boats to the lock, just as the long walls of the Ohio, the Illinois, the Tennessee, the upper Mississippi lead thousand-foot tows past the bullnoses of guide walls and into locks today. In boulders along the Merrimack we saw iron rings, where canal boats, in the heavy traffic, were tied up to wait for their turns in the lock. The drop at Cromwell's Falls is about six feet in something over half a mile—enough to make us work, and more than enough to make us wonder about the multiple rapids ahead. Once again, the rain was turning into mist.

"We passed Cromwell's Falls, the first we met with on this river, this forenoon, by means of locks, without using our wheels," Thoreau says. They had brought a set of wheels from Concord to help them get around the rips of the Merrimack, but they never needed them. Reading "The New England Gazetteer," Thoreau learned that Cromwell was a seventeenth-century trader whose dishonesty made a poor impression on the natives and they resolved to murder him. "This intention was communicated to Cromwell, who buried his wealth and made his escape," said the gazetteer. Locally, Cromwell's buried wealth gave rise to as much legend as a Spanish galleon under the Straits of Florida. Thoreau rehearses various tales about farmers who may or may not have plowed their way to Park Avenue, and concludes with a remark that could have founded the Republican Party: "The truth is, there is money buried every where, and you have only to go work to find it."

"These falls are the Nesenkeag of the Indians," he points out. "Great Nesenkeag Stream comes in on the right just above." The "keag" in "Nesenkeag" is pronounced "keg," as is the same syllable in "Amoskeag." Just above Cromwell's Falls on Route 3, very close to but not visible from the river, is a Budweiser brewery that has a production average of eighteen thousand kegs a day.

Several canal boats were present; the Thoreaus had to wait for the locks, for they were now "fairly in the stream of this week's commerce." In 1839, commerce was what the river was about, the purpose toward which it had been altered. Some years before, the bricks of Lowell had been clay in the ground five or six miles above Cromwell's Falls, and now the bricks of Manchester were coming downriver to Amoskeag from Hooksett, much in the way that the Empire State Building would come to New York from bedrock near Bloomington, Indiana. A canal boat—seventy-five feet long, nine and a half feet wide—could carry sixteen thousand bricks. It could carry sixteen hundred cords of wood. The Middlesex Canal and the canals of the Merrimack falls had opened the way to market for the commercial freight of northern New England. Dams, pools, locks, and canals had urbanized Passaconaway's river and implied the future of other rivers. Thoreau is lyrical on the working life of the river boatmen, whose outdoor existence he ranks extremely high. At Cromwell's, the brothers talk with one, "a rude Apollo of a man . . . in whose wrinkles the sun still lodged, as little touched by the heats and frosts and withering cares of life, as a maple of the mountain." Two such men crewed each boat, often barefoot. Upcurrent, they used poles about fifteen feet long with iron tips. They jammed the pole into the river bottom and then strained against it, same way you pole a canoe. Downcurrent, they steered—an oar at either end. Horses drew them the twenty-seven miles on the Middlesex Canal. A horse, just walking around, can carry roughly two hundred and fifty pounds. A horse dragging a canal boat could move fifty tons.

When the Thoreaus were small boys, the steamboat Merrimack, with a hundred and fifty people and a brass band, went up the canal from Boston and fifty-some miles into New Hampshire. Occasionally, in their boyhood years, a canal boat would come up the Concord River "silently as a cloud, without noise or dust." They marvelled that the "vessel would float, like a huge chip, sustaining so many casks of lime, and thousands of bricks, and such heaps of iron ore, with wheel-barrows aboard."

On the Merrimack in 1839, they would hang on to a canal boat, drift back with it, chat with the boatmen, and make use of the company water jug. Rowing north, Henry seems to have developed an opinion of the canal boats themselves that hovered closer to hate than to love: "A canal boat, with its sail set, glided round a point before us, like some huge river beast, and changed the scene in an instant; and then another and another glided into sight, and we found ourselves in the current of commerce once more." He describes them "creeping stealthily up the side of the stream like alligators." Elsewhere, "with their broad sails set, they moved slowly up the stream in the sluggish and fitful breeze, like one-winged antediluvian birds." The railroad was about to kill all these creatures. Writing his story in the eighteen-forties, Thoreau said, "The locks are fast wearing out, and will soon be impassable."

A mile or so above Cromwell's Falls, Thoreau climbed the always isolating bank and the steep river terraces above it to a point where he could see the precursory Route 3 "a quarter or half a mile distant, and the parti-colored Concord stage, with its cloud of dust, its van of earnest travelling faces." A mile upriver were Thornton's Ferry and Naticook Brook, which the Thoreaus drank. Matthew Thornton's is one of the three New Hampshire signatures on the Declaration of Independence. Had the Thoreaus climbed the banks and terraces there, they would have seen his homestead, which still stands, a door away from Dunkin' Donuts.

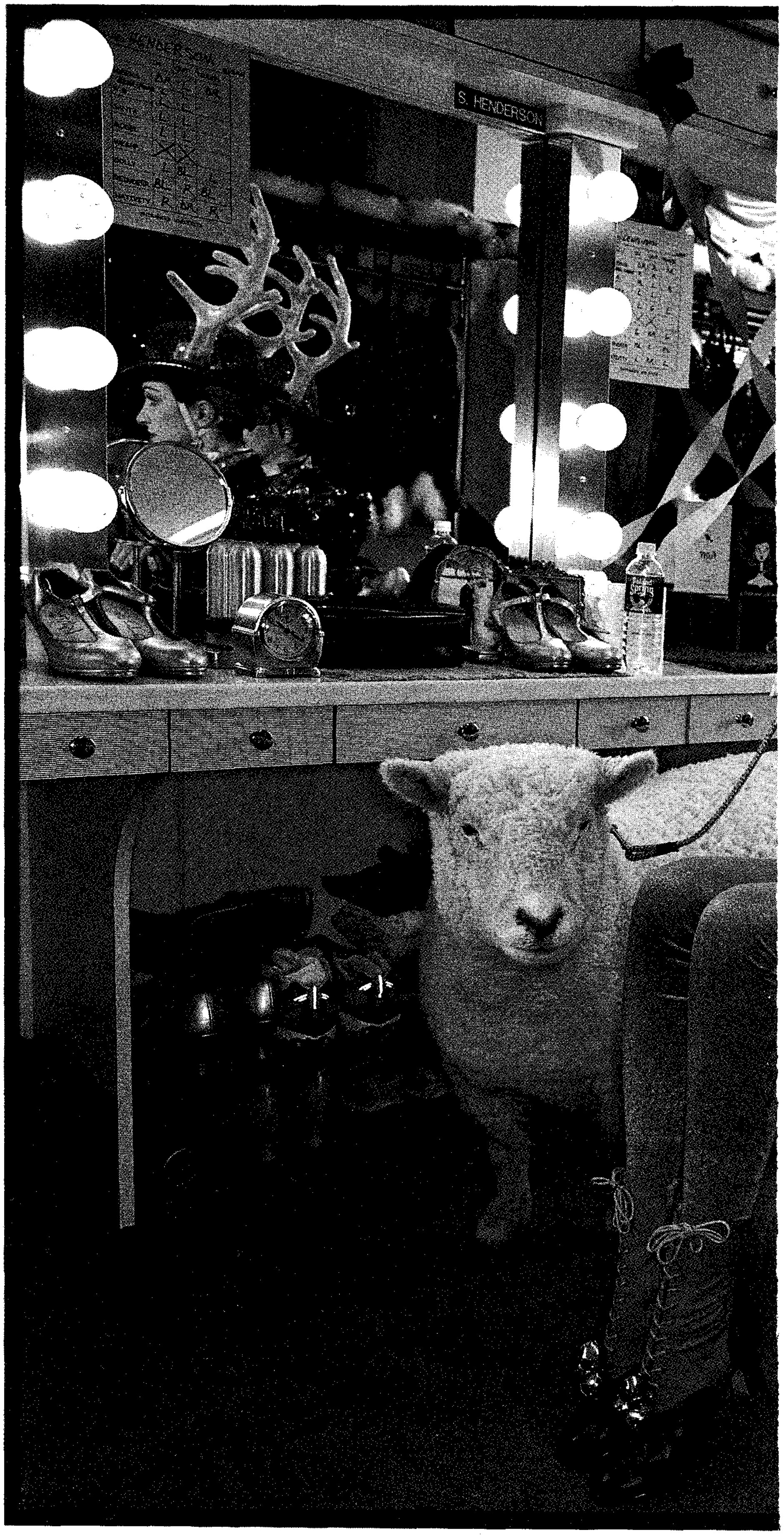
A couple of miles up the Merrimack, the Thoreaus stop for lunch, as did we, on "a large island . . . with steep banks and scattered elms and oaks." The island is a couple of thousand feet long, and where they stop is not reported, but this is what they do for lunch: they notice a flock of migrating pigeons filling up the trees, and Thoreau bursts into song about the "greater travellers far than we" and the "wiry winnowing sound of their wings" and "their gentle and tremulous cooing." Running out of ode, he says, "We obtained one of these handsome birds, which lingered too long upon its perch. . . . It is true, it did not seem to be putting this bird to its right use, to pluck off its feathers, and extract its entrails, and broil its carcass on the coals; but we heroically persevered, nevertheless, waiting for further information."

Under a red maple near the north end of the island, where driftwood trees were piled high, Mark and I ate tuna-salad sandwiches, and, in lieu of boiled cocoa, finished them off with bittersweet chocolate. On the mainland, a cellphone tower, its head above the trees, watched over us. In the sand at our feet were two golf balls—each a Strata 0. The Thoreaus would go on to camp on the west bank above Coos Falls, but we elected to stop at Reeds Ferry and spend some time in the late afternoon assessing the Union Canal.

Frankly, it seemed impossible. Along the riverbanks leading into Manchester are precious few places—among all the industrial parking lots, airport approach roads, and dead-end streets—where you can get close enough to the river to have a look at the rapids, but from the Granite Street Bridge and the long Amoskeag River Walk at Arms Park we saw tumbling cascades that were even more rock than rapid. Through dense trees in Londonderry, near the airport, we glimpsed Coos Falls, fifty vertical feet below us and not much farther away. The water wove itself in white strands through massive black boulders. In Litchfield, farther south, we walked half a mile on a trail through high grass and along an abandoned trolley line in forest and down to Moore's Falls, longest of all, about a third of a mile—a beautiful riverscape in white, black, and green, the fact notwithstanding that it called to mind a quarry.

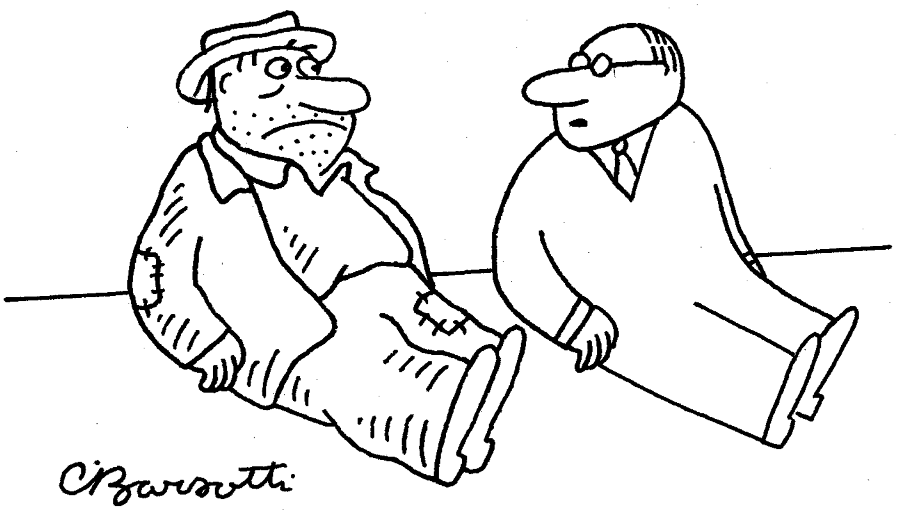
From Moore's Falls to Amoskeag Falls, a distance of about nine miles, the river least resembles what the Thoreaus saw, not only because a city of a hundred thousand has arisen where they entered a growing village whose population in 1830 had been eight hundred and seventy-seven but, as noted, because they ascended the falls in locks and passed them in canals. We faced not only the sequence of rapids but the boniest rapids you would ever see, and we were facing them in the wrong direction. What to do?

At nine in the morning, we set off from Reeds Ferry and paddled up toward Moore's Falls, scarcely half a mile. From downriver, the rapids seemed to be a high New England stone wall across the end of a field, an illusion to be repeated all day. After landing on the east bank, we set the canoe's center thwart, which was shaped as a carrying yoke, on Mark's shoulders, and we climbed in two hundred yards the sixty vertical feet that got us to St. Francis of Assisi Church, on the river's highest terrace, among parochial schoolchildren aswarm in a playground. There we met Yolanda and the Odyssey, put the canoe on top, and further portaged a third of a mile to a cul-de-sac where an empty house with a



HIGH KICKING *Michelle Imor and Natalie King Smith, Rockettes, and Leonardo, a shee*

*ackstage after a performance of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular at Radio City Music Hall. Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.*



*"Oh, I'm just riding out the cycle."*

• •

real-estate sign hovered over the river. It was a form of portage I came, marginally, to regret, but the Thoreaus had two wheels, never mind that they didn't use them, and we had four. They had a two-thousand-foot canal down there and two locks to lift their boat a total of ten feet; we had the ruins. Moreover, Moore's Falls is not only the longest rapid in the river; it is also the shallowest, suggesting Lexington Avenue in a heavy rain. With a fifty-foot rope, we lowered the loaded canoe down the precipitous incline, and from the lip of the bank lowered it again, the ten-foot drop to the river. You can't hurt an Old Town Penobscot 16.

Quoting "The New England Gazetteer," Thoreau says, "We reached some rapids called Moore's Falls, and entered on 'that section of the river, nine miles in extent, converted, by law, into the Union Canal, comprehending in that space six distinct falls.' " Aimed at the next five, Mark and I continued upriver. Having no idea what sort of progress we could make, we had decided to give eight hours to the Union Canal, see how far we could get, and then find a way to remove the canoe from the river. We thought of Stark Landing, in the middle of the city, about three hundred yards below the Granite Street Bridge, but that was wishful thinking. Above Moore's Falls was a mile of flat water, or almost flat water. It was moving right along, but it was nothing like our training pitch on the upper Delaware. Thoreau describes "rowing incessantly" through here and how pleasant it was to ease over into a canal and "lock ourselves through . . . for commonly there was no lock-man at hand,—one sitting in the boat, while the other, sometimes with no little labor and heave-yoing, opened and shut the gates, waiting patiently to see the locks fill." A few lines later, he says, "We rowed leisurely up the stream," and in places it was like that for Mark and me as well. It wasn't all heave-yoing. It wasn't all stiff current coming around boulders. There were swirling eddies, where current locally turned upriver. There were some deep, long pools.

On this date (September 3rd), the Thoreaus camped on the west bank just above Coos Falls—a name pronounced in New Hampshire with two syllables, like "chaos," and in Oregon with one syllable, as in "goose." As we approached Coos, we were again confronted by the chimeric stone wall, making the river look impassable. At each big rapid, a wing dam had been a component of the engineering—an oblique arm sticking far up into but not all the way across the river, its purpose to divert water through the canals and locks. The wing dam at Moore's Falls had been thirty-two hundred feet long, at Coos twenty-five hundred. That's a lot of rock to pile up. Now scattered through the rapids, it appears from a distance to be as integral as it once was, and from nearby to be the rocks of a riverbed on Mars. The Coos canal had been framed by the east bank and an island, and now consisted of two small pools separated by isthmuses of high dry rock. It was certainly no thoroughfare, but it seemed preferable to the souse holes, standing waves, and growling water that reached across the river from the west side of the island. We carried the canoe up and over the first isthmus, paddled the second pool, and carried the canoe across the boulders to the north end of the island. There was still a lot of white water in front of us and no way to paddle it, so I walked upcurrent with the fifty-foot rope and, when it was straight, turned and pulled the canoe up to me. Three good pulls and it came on its own, or so it seemed—just picked its way around the boulders, up ledges, and through the little rips until I had to stop it with my hand. Mark came up and held the canoe while I made my way upstream another fifty feet with the rope. I turned and pulled. That got us to the pool above Coos Falls.

Soon we were at Goff's Falls, where the Thoreaus found "a small village, and a handsome green islet in the middle of the stream," and we found New Hampshire's largest city. The United States Geological Survey has a gauge at Goff's Falls, and on this day (as we would learn later) it was registering 3.25 feet, the river running at fourteen hundred and sixty cubic feet per second. A week before, it had been running at twice that volume. Four days later, it would be doing so again. There was a big iron bracket—like a staple, in cross-section two inches square—at the base of Goff's Falls. Mark tied the canoe to the iron for a while, to let it calm down before we lined it up the rapids.

The next rapid was just downstream of the bridge where I-293 completes a link from its parent highway to the Everett Turnpike, on the west side of the river. The trucks looked down into the Class 3 chaos of Short's Falls, the whitest water avoided by the Union Canal, with a central drop of seven feet in eleven yards. The roar of the river swallowed the sound from the bridge. We couldn't hear the trucks. We got into the river and walked the canoe, shoved it up sluices and hauled it over ledges. Mark later asked me what I had liked best about this day, and I said, "The way the canoe came up through the rips, following so readily when you pulled on the rope. It seemed to want to get up there as much as we did." In Short's Falls, though, there wasn't much of a chance to pull rope. Hanging on to the canoe, letting it support us as we moved against the currents, seemed the more sensible thing to do. A given piece of white water can be both softer than you think and less forgiving. It can let you walk through it, and it can pin you to a rock for the rest of your life. There were times, in holes, when I was up to my armpits, but that could not be called dramatic. Among armpits on this planet, mine do not imply great depth.

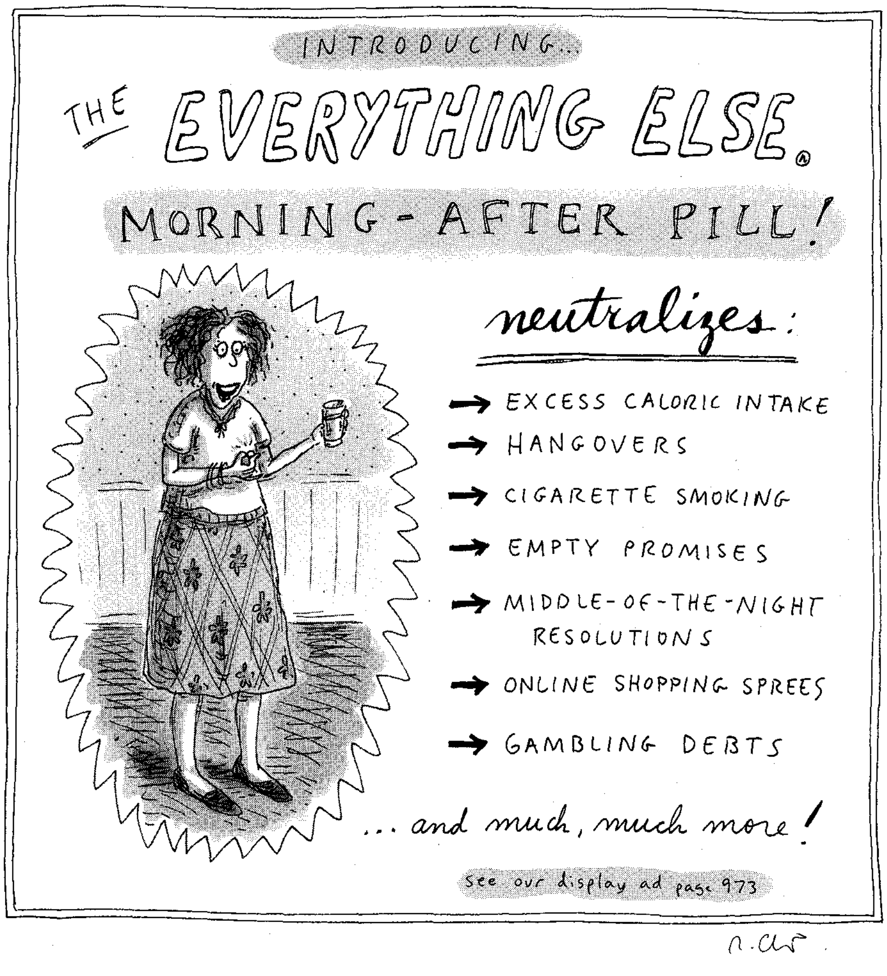
Four hundred yards above the interstate bridge, we came to Carthagina Island, standing in a flat-water pool. Thoreau doesn't call it by name, but he describes it as "a large and densely wooded island . . . the fairest which we had met with, with a handsome grove of elms at its head." Carthagina Island is more than two thousand feet long. The American elms seemed to be gone, as you might expect; but there, sitting on a big rock in the river near the head of the island, was the icon American bird—a bald eagle, which appeared to have enjoyed a lifetime in which it had eaten extremely well. The Merrimack, even in Massachusetts, had been well attended by kingfishers, sandpipers, and eagles in the air. But this big eagle on the rock seemed in no hurry to move, seemed to have shed whatever ambition it once had. It looked lazy, fat, accomplished, interested mainly in its investments.

Less than half a mile above Carthagina, at Griffin's Falls, where a twenty-five-hundred-foot wing dam had deflected water toward the east bank of the river and into a canal, the wing dam was, as usual, strewn through the rapids, but the canal was in beautiful condition. On its two sides, the big perches of windlassed granite were close in appearance to what they would have looked like when masons finished them in 1811. With Cromwell's Locks, this was the best relic of the Union Canal. Beside the top of the east wall was flat ground, a filled-in piece of the steep riverside, where the lockman's house must have been. Water was racing through the canal and lock, the doors, of course, long gone, and we would have put the canoe up through there had a large fallen tree, five or six feet in circumference, not been lying across the foot of the canal a few inches off the water. So we had to go around the lock, shoving and lining the canoe up the rapids and back into the canal at its upper end.

We decided to stop for lunch, Griffin's being a lovely place. If you are familiar with necropolitan Manchester, it is just down the bank from Pine Grove Cemetery, a mile below the Queen City Bridge. We had beached the canoe, spread our provender on the rocks, and were drying out a little when I happened to glance upward. My wife was studying us through the trees. All morning, she had been tracking us from byways and bridges, a feat so difficult in an automobile that she had failed to catch up until now, never mind that she was cleverer than I had been in finding places to get at the river, such as this one. We offered her lunch, and she accepted.

We shoved off. There was some tumbling water near an island half a mile up, and it seemed to be making sound befitting a big falls. I thought, That little rapid sure makes a lot of noise for something that is scarcely more than a riffle. What we were hearing, through a cuff of trees, was the combined Everett Turnpike and I-293, which go through downtown Manchester tight to the west bank of the river. In Thoreau's words, "The trees made an admirable fence to the landscape, skirting the horizon on every side."

Against the somewhat stepped-up current, we went under the Queen City Bridge and past the mouth of a tributary stream. Or, as Thoreau tells it, "Not long after this we saw the Piscataquoag, or Sparkling Water, emptying in on our left, and heard the Falls of Amoskeag above." The falls of Amoskeag were two miles upstream, and mighty they had been, but now—in 1839—they had long since been eunuched by the dam that was providing water for Manchester's power canals, not to mention the thousands of feet of boat canal on which the Thoreaus would cruise through town. What the brothers were hearing from the mouth of the Piscataquog, as they soon discovered, was not Amoskeag Falls but the outlet of the power canals. Growing there as the Thoreaus went by was a solid mile of brick buildings, rising in four long tiers above the river—far and



away the largest collocation of cotton mills in the world, and destined to make Lowell the Second City of spindles.

> Just above the mouth of this river we passed the artificial falls where the canals of the Manchester Manufacturing Company discharge themselves into the Merrimack. They are striking enough to have a name, and, with the scenery of a Bashpish, would be visited from far and near. The water falls thirty or forty feet over seven or eight steep and narrow terraces of stone, to break its force, and is converted into one mass of foam.

In September, 2003, no roaring water was falling down the terraces of stone, no exotic tourists were present, and there was nothing much to see on the river but forty seagulls in conference. Soon, we came to Stark Landing—farther up all the rapids than we had thought we'd ever get. Yolanda and the Odyssey had not arrived to meet us. The canoe, once again, had been faster. An elderly fisherman was sitting in a folding chair, flipping his lure into the river with no apparent interest in what it might encounter. He asked us what time it was.

"Two-thirty."

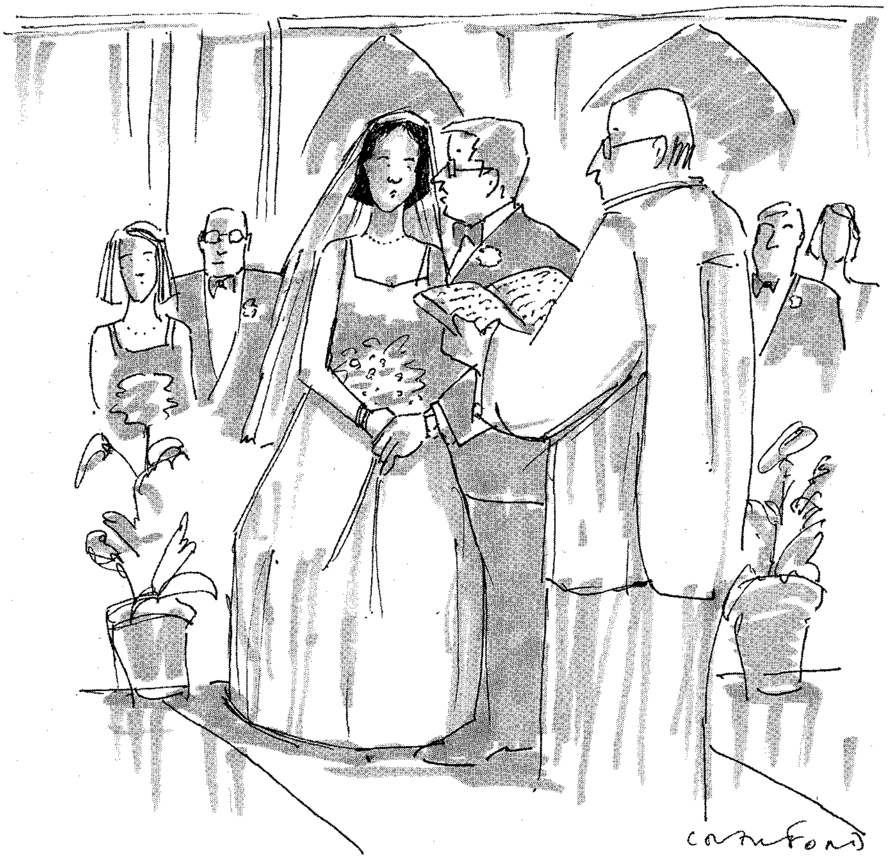
Mark and I looked at each other. We had been on the river less than six hours.

The stem of the canoe never touched the landing. Instead, it swung left, and headed for Amoskeag Falls. Quickly, we came to the rapids under the Granite Street Bridge. We crossed the river below them, and went up a few chutes on the west side, before paddling became impossible. We poled a little, but gave that up, jumped into the river, and walked and lined as before. To tell you the truth, it was easier hauling upstream than it would have been going in the other direction and clunking against all those rocks. It was actually a lot of fun—reading the river, picking the river, shoving the boat up the *fil d'eau*, using the tongues of water, walking the eddy walls. So why did we cross the river to go up the western side? To mitigate embarrassment, among other things. This was Merrill's Falls, Manchester, at the city's central riverfront, where—from Arms Park, on the eastern side—a virtual amphitheatre of granite steps descended to the river. In bed at night for three or four months, I'd been listening to Manchester laughing—a chorus of Mancunians sitting on those steps convulsed by us on the way uphill with our canoe. If they had laughed at the Thoreau brothers, they would surely laugh at us:

> We locked ourselves through here with much ado, surmounting the successive watery steps of this river's stair-case in the midst of a crowd of villagers, jumping into the canal to their amusement, to save our boat from upsetting, and consuming much river water in our service.

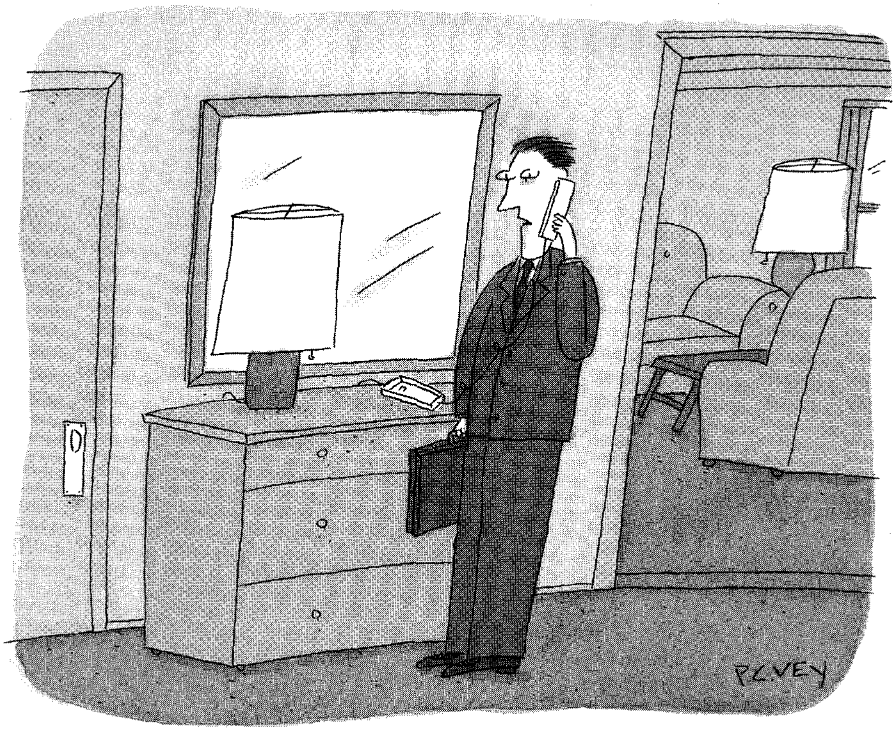
Through boulder gardens and bygone weirs, we gained on Notre Dame Bridge, passing Arms Park, the granite steps, and a completely indifferent Manchester—an all but empty River Walk, a chorus of zero. Overhead were a great many quarter-inch cables, perpendicular to the currents, a gridiron in the air, strung high from shore to shore. From the cables, during kayak competitions, slalom gates are hung, touching the white water. I found three golf balls in Merrill's Falls. One was from a driving range who knows where, and one carried the logo of Intervale Country Club, two miles above Amoskeag Dam. Gradually, we got to the northern side of Notre Dame Bridge, and for us the end of white water. But not the end of stiff current. We climbed back over the gunwales, settled in, and to stay above the rips were paddling with all we had when the cell phone rang in the canoe. Someone closely related to us was calling to congratulate us, but we were paddling for all we were worth—really working at it in a muscle-aching way—and were in no position to take an adulation break, so, rudely, we didn't take the call. Glancing across the river, we could see the caller on the Amoskeag River Walk.

As Thoreau notes, "The descent of Amoskeag Falls, which are the most considerable in the Merrimack, is fifty-four feet in half a mile." That will give you a rapid to reckon with, and at this thunderous place Native American people immemorially convened. Thoreau says that "Amoskeag" means "great fishing place." R. A. Douglas-Lithgow's "Native American Place Names of Maine, New Hampshire, & Vermont" says it also means "One takes small fish." Be that as it may, Wannalancet kept a house nearby. We gained momentum and went on up the west side of the river in the tailrace pool of the dam, past the bare and truly mountainous beds of the dead cascade. The boat canal had required nine staired locks to get above it, when the thunder ceased.



*"You'll do."*

On a small sandy beach just below the dam, Mark and I gave each other a high ten. Then we carried the canoe up an extremely short, extremely steep trail—those fifty-four vertical feet—and into the parking lot of a Ramada, where we were checked in.



*"I just got home. Can you call back tomorrow when I'm still at work?"*

This was storied Amoskeag, where the spray curled up like smoke, and where Indians and Colonists, in an annual rite of the spring migrations, danced, feasted, fished, and wrote treaties. In 1739, a hundred years before the Thoreaus' journey, the preacher Joseph Seccombe, who called himself Fluviatulis Piscator, delivered a sermon here that was later published as "A Discourse Utter'd in Part at Ammauskeeg-Falls, in the Fishing-Season." Nine known copies exist of this first American publication on sport fishing, which Fluviatulis Piscator resonantly defended before his racially mixed outdoor congregation. A copy was sold at auction in 2001 for eighteen thousand dollars. That would surely impress Thoreau, in various respects: in 2003, you could still buy an original cloth first edition of "Walden" from www.theworldsgreatbooks.com/literature.htm for only twelve thousand five.

Just above the dam, we launched the canoe at nine-fifteen in the morning, in water, on this fourth of September, 52.8 feet higher than the water we had left the afternoon before. After scraping nine miles over bedrock and boulders, we were all but disoriented by the depth. It felt aerial. "Above Amoskeag the river spreads out into a lake reaching a mile or two without a bend," Thoreau writes, and this expansive reach among shorefront condominiums and broadcasting towers is where he thought the canal boats, sailing on ahead of him, were like a flight of one-winged antediluvian birds. Two miles north, at the first bend, we passed Intervale Country Club in a light steady rain, the calming, cooling sort of weather that had followed us all through the trip. We were outrun by a golf cart rolling along a fairway with a large umbrella open overhead, making it appear to be a rickshaw from NASA. Aiming now for the big piers where Interstate 93 crosses the river, we passed private homes in the trophy range, with tessellated riprap like fortress walls, and elaborate stairways, balustered white, descending the riprap in stages to dual-consoled cockpit boats tied up below.

Making good time on the motionless water, we had soon covered more than five miles, were back in the wooded isolation characteristic of the river, and were looking up a straight shot of two and a half miles to a small distinctive mountain, or, in Thoreau's words, "We could see rising before us through the mist a dark conical eminence called Hooksett Pinnacle." After passing under three bridges, two of them abandoned, we would come to the end of our trip at A. J. Lambert Riverside Park, Hooksett Village, below Hooksett Dam—a spectacular scene colluding natural white cascades with water falling over the dam and plunging from the powerhouse.

The Thoreaus had not rowed that far. They had stopped for the night—September 4th—somewhere close to the beginnings of the last long reach toward the Pinnacle, where we were now. This was where John went to the farmhouse for provisions and came back with "a loaf of home-made bread, and musk and water-melons for dessert." Then the brothers crossed the river, to the east bank, and found a "convenient harbor"—the mouth of a small stream—where they could hide their boat. This was as far north as they travelled on the Merrimack River, the place from which they went off on foot and by stagecoach for seventeen pages in the White Mountains—their week within a week—and then returned to find the hidden boat and head downstream for home. Mark and I found the mouth of a brook coming in from under a railroad track through a very long cylindrical culvert, which we could look through as through a telescope, seeing verdure at the far end, H. D. Thoreau framed in cameo.

"We had come away up here among the hills to learn the impartial and unbribable beneficence of Nature," he says of this moment, but while he was waxing philosophical one of his melons drifted away. He had put it in the mouth of the creek to cool, and it took off. "In pursuit of this property," the brothers jumped into their boat, chased the melon downstream, and, "after long straining of the eyes, its green disk was discovered far down the river, gently floating seaward." They had cut a tap out of the melon to hasten the cooling, yet the melon had stayed upright, and, in the unbribable beneficence of Nature, no water had gone into the tap. ♦

## THE DIPLOMATIC ROUND

# BACK ROADS

*How serious is the Bush Administration about creating a Palestinian state?*

### BY CONNIE BRUCK

In the 2000 Presidential campaign, George W. Bush was sharply critical of Bill Clinton's efforts to pressure Israel for a peace settlement with the Palestinians. "In recent times, Washington has tried to make Israel conform to its own plans and timetables," Bush said. "But this is not the path to peace." He seemed determined not to allow his own Administration to become mired in the conflict, and during the first year of his Presidency Bush kept his distance, despite escalating violence in the region. Then, in November, 2001, two months after the September 11th attacks, Bush seemed to change his mind, telling the United Nations General Assembly, "We are working toward a day when two states, Israel and Palestine, live peacefully together within secure and recognized borders." He had now endorsed, more explicitly than any previous President, the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Last April, the President presented each side with an actual plan—the so-called "road map" to peace. In the first of a series of projected phases, it called for the Palestinian Authority to curtail terrorist groups and for Israel to dismantle settlement outposts and to freeze the construction of new settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The road map was marketed as being different from the Oslo plan of the nineties, in that it made progress contingent upon the two parties' performance. In June, Bush convened a summit in Aqaba, Jordan, and exhorted the two sides to "keep their promises" by following the outlined steps according to the plan's schedule. He pledged that his Administration would be fully involved, saying, "I've also asked Secretary of State Colin Powell and national-security adviser Condoleezza Rice to make this cause a matter of the highest priority." And for a time it seemed that it was.

Not everyone in the Administration shared the President's view. Some of Bush's neoconservative supporters—former liberals who became fervent Cold Warriors in the nineteen-seventies and today tend to urge Israelis to take a hard line—thought that Israel should not give up the occupied territories or allow the creation of a Palestinian state. The road map also drew public criticism from a number of prominent neoconservatives outside the Administration; others, however, seemed content to let the plan take its course, certain that this plan, like so many before it, would fail. Their equanimity may have stemmed, in part, from their confidence in the plan's White House facilitator, Elliott Abrams.

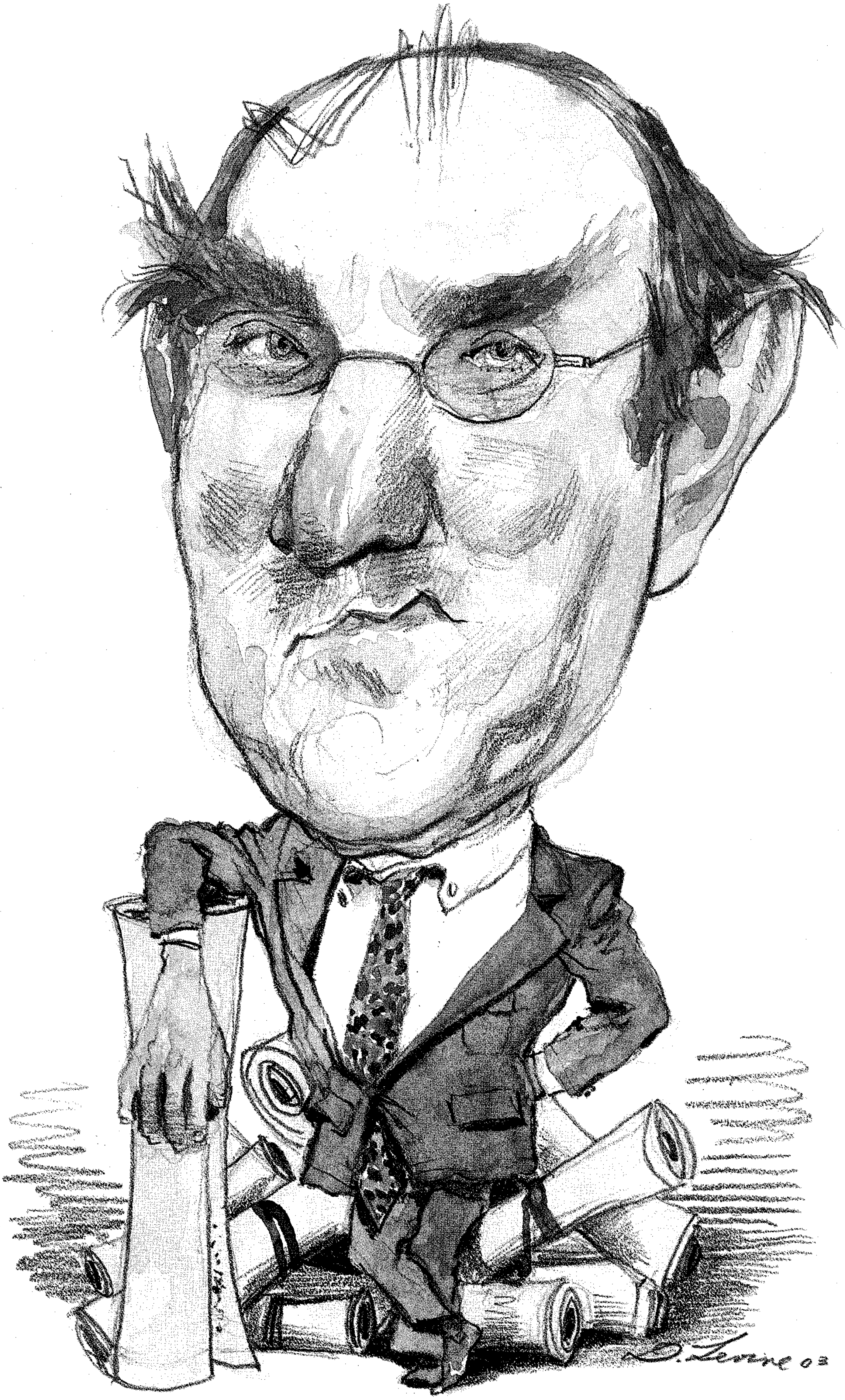
In the Reagan Administration, Abrams was one of the fiercest supporters of the Nicaraguan contras, and subsequently pleaded guilty to criminal charges of having withheld information from Congress. His life in government appeared to be over. In December of 1992, however, he and five others in the case were pardoned by President George H. W. Bush, and in the second Bush Presidency Abrams was offered a job with the National Security Council. Last December, while working for Condoleezza Rice, Abrams was appointed the N.S.C.'s senior director for Near East and North African affairs. Iran and Iraq were part of his portfolio—"I have two-thirds of the axis of evil!" he enthused to one well-wisher. And the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became a cardinal responsibility.

Abrams had long held hawkish positions on Israel. In the early nineties, he helped form the Committee on U.S. Interests in the Middle East, which opposed President Bush's efforts to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to participate in the Madrid peace conference, and then opposed territorial concessions for peace. After Shamir's successor, Yitzhak Rabin, decided to pursue the Oslo peace process, Abrams became a staunch critic of that process. Not long before his appointment to the N.S.C., Abrams wrote an article for a Web site called beliefnet.com in which he praised Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as someone who understood that "the road to peace lies through strength instead of weakness, and firmness rather than unilateral concessions," and compared Sharon to Winston Churchill. Among supporters of the Israeli hard line, Abrams's appointment last December was greeted with jubilation. By early May, however, the President's newly revealed peace plan, with its goal of a "sovereign, independent, democratic and viable Palestine" by 2005, had dampened their spirits considerably.

At this year's dinner for the Commentary Magazine Fund, in May, Abrams—whose father-in-law is Norman Podhoretz, the former editor of *Commentary*, and whose mother-in-law is the writer Midge Decter—told his audience that no terms would be imposed on Israel and the Palestinians by outside parties, saying, "It is a peace that if it is ever to be made has to be made between *them*." He explained that he had just returned from a trip to Israel, where he had met with Sharon and other Israeli government officials. "I did not find the government of Israel nearly as concerned about this as American Jews, and I think the Israelis have it right." Abrams seemed to be suggesting to his listeners that they were taking an even harder line than Sharon's right-wing Likud government. It was one thing for such an audience to hear this sort of message from a State Department official (who might be an "Arabist"), and quite another from a favorite son. Had Elliott Abrams changed sides? Was the Bush Administration really serious about creating a Palestinian state?

Abrams grew up in a middle-class family in Queens, the son of Democrats so liberal that they named their sons Franklin and Elliott. There were early signs, however, that Elliott had different affinities. Even as a teen-ager at Manhattan's progressive Elisabeth Irwin High School, he was offended by the left-wing

DAVID LEVINE



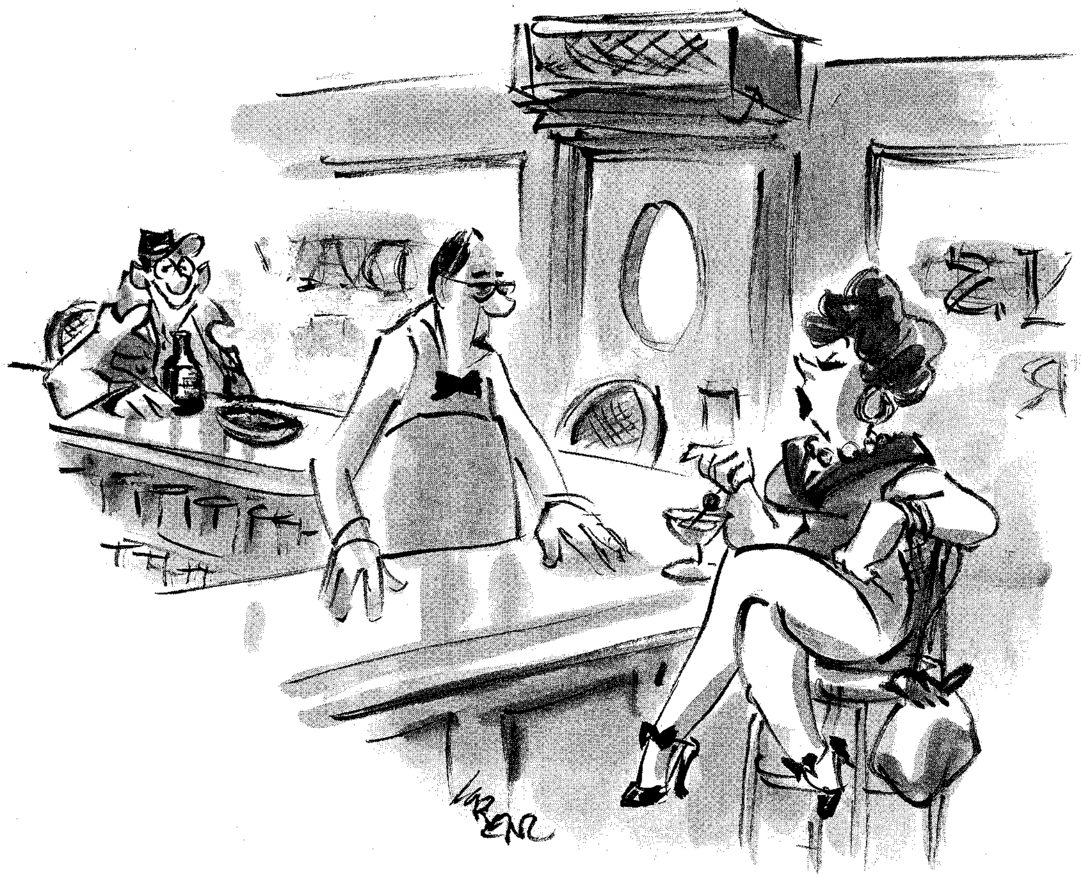
*Elliott Abrams's return to government thrilled his hard-line supporters—until they learned about the "road map" peace initiative.*

sympathies of his peers, and by what he saw as the excesses of a radical, undisciplined time. After graduating from Harvard Law School, in 1973, he practiced law briefly in New York but soon went to Washington, where he worked as special counsel for Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, a Cold Warrior Democrat and one of neoconservatism's progenitors; working in that office, too, were the men who would become Abrams's political allies in the coming decades, Douglas Feith and Richard Perle. In 1977, Abrams went to work for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and ultimately became his chief of staff. In 1979, he left Moynihan's office and later helped to recruit Jewish voters for Ronald Reagan. He switched parties, and, after Reagan's victory, he was named Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs—at thirty-three, the youngest Assistant Secretary in the twentieth century. The same year, as a member of a search team to find a new Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Abrams successfully put himself forward for the post. Although Alexander Haig, the Secretary of State, had wanted to do away with the Carter Administration's emphasis upon human rights in its foreign policy, Abrams argued that the human-rights issue could be a powerful weapon in the fight against Communism.

In his new position, Abrams essentially argued that whatever the Reagan Administration was doing to prevent a country from going Communist was in the service of human rights. The problem with this conceit was that the forces that the United States supported themselves often committed unspeakable violations of human rights. In El Salvador, for example, civilian massacres by government troops were downplayed or denied by the State Department in order to justify continuing United States aid. Abrams and others in the Administration consistently attacked the credibility of the journalists and human-rights organizations that published accounts of government killings.

In cases of rightist human-rights violations where the anti-Communist stakes were not so high, Abrams took a more evenhanded approach. He vigorously pressed for change in Augusto Pinochet's Chile, and fought Senator Jesse Helms and the right wing in the Administration. Stephen Sestanovich, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who has known Abrams since they both worked for Moynihan, told me, "He's unusually effective at combining different strands of policy. It's a mark of his performance in these jobs—showing an acute sensitivity to what his political opponents are worried about and knowing how to win them over, or neutralize their animosity toward him, or at least befuddle them in the caricatured pictures they want to draw of him."

Abrams's adroitness failed him when it came to his fervent activities on behalf of the right-wing contras in Nicaragua. Since the end of 1981, the United States had been providing the contras with financial support and military assistance in their effort to overthrow the Sandinista government, which had the backing of the Soviet Union. In October of 1984, however, Congress prohibited government funding of military or para-



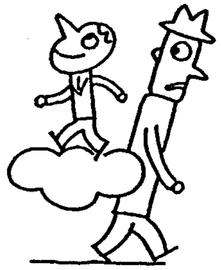
*"The gentleman behind me has invited you to join him on a four-day holiday package to Orlando, Florida, which includes airfare, deluxe accommodations, two free passes to Disney World, all transfers, and a V.I.P. tour of the area's most exciting new condominium opportunity."*

military operations in Nicaragua. An attempt to circumvent this prohibition resulted in the Iran-contra affair, involving efforts by Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and others to illegally fund the contras and supply them with arms. Abrams worked closely with North on some issues, and was Reagan's chief advocate before Congress for continued support of the contras. Abrams was at war with the Sandinistas, with the Democratic Congress, and with anyone who opposed his allegiance to the contras. His denunciations became a trademark: the former United States Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White was a "crank and fanatical hater of this Administration"; the *Times* columnist Anthony Lewis was guilty of "anti-Americanism" for "smearing United States policy in Central America."

In 1991, Abrams pleaded guilty to withholding information from two congressional committees when he testified about his knowledge of government involvement in the contra supply network and in fund-raising for the contras. He was sentenced to two years' probation and community service.

After his pardon, Abrams remained in Washington during the Clinton years. He kept up his old ties among the Reagan faithful, and made new political allies on the religious right. In 1997, he published "Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America," which warned against Jewish assimilation. The book also offered a passionate defense of Evangelical Christians as a group that is misunderstood and discriminated against, and reflected, among other things, his own deepening involvement with conservative Judaism. That year, he also became one of the founding members of a think tank called Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Among the organization's other founders were Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis Libby, and Podhoretz and Decter. Abrams had been concerned that since the end of the Cold War there was no consensus even among conservatives about what to do on defense. PNAC set out to articulate a policy. In a letter written to President Clinton in 1998, PNAC members declared that the first order of the day was to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq—and to be prepared to do so militarily, without being "crippled by a misguided insistence on unanimity in the U.N. Security Council."

Shortly after the Presidential contest of 2000 was decided, Abrams visited people he knew on Capitol Hill. He did not exactly go hat in hand, but he was not the arrogant, denunciatory Abrams of the eighties, either. "He said he'd come to believe that he was wrong about some things—that some human-rights groups had been right in certain instances," a congressional staffer whom Abrams went to see told me. "He said some people whom he had identified as his enemies he now believed had been playing a legitimate role—but that he had lumped them all together as evil because they were opposing him. I think he was testing the waters—you know, trying to see if he could get a confirmable post."



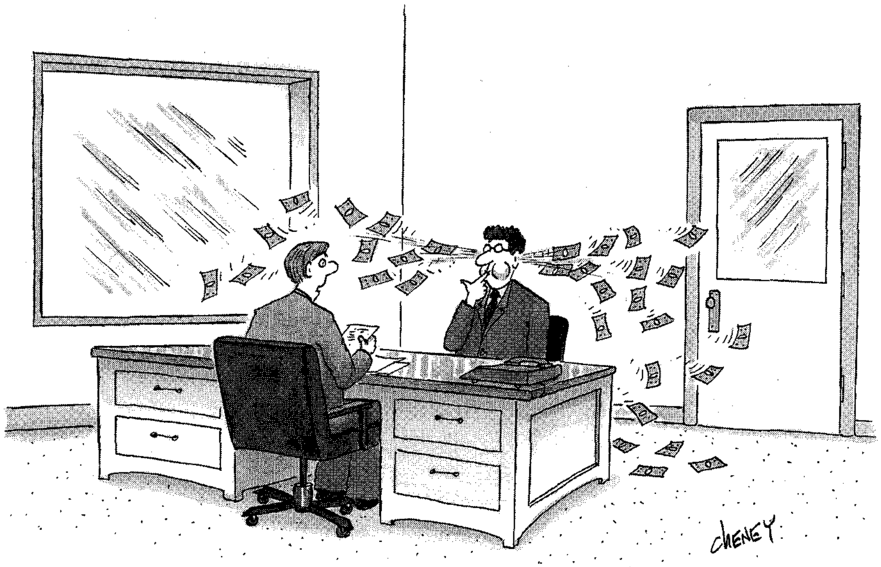
The Bush Administration offered Abrams the position on the National Security Council, which required no Senate confirmation, shortly before the September 11th attacks. Soon afterward, views that had once been widely written off as the extremist doctrine of a faction of ex-Reaganites and neoconservatives became the policy of the United States government. Once again, the world was a dangerous place, shadowed by an overarching threat—not Communism but terrorism—and democracy was the universal antidote. "I feel young again!" Abrams exulted to a friend last year. "I love all these battles—they're so familiar to me."

"What runs through Elliott's thinking is a deep, almost quasi-religious devotion to democracy," said Father Richard John Neuhaus, a close colleague of Midge Decter, and someone who has known Abrams for many years. "He thinks real democratic change can happen in the Middle East. It's breathtaking, in a way." The view of the world which Abrams and his compatriots brought to the Middle East can seem impervious to local political and cultural distinctions—and, in the case of the Administration's democratic hopes for Iraq, possibly naïve.

In the turmoil at the N.S.C. after September 11th, Abrams stood out as a problem solver—focussed, quick, and decisive, unburdened by doubt. Colleagues noted that while they might have hundreds of e-mails in their queues, Abrams didn't have any. "He deals with it and deletes—no second thoughts, no looking back," one of them said. Condoleezza Rice plainly valued him. According to a friend of hers, she saw him "not just as a good manager but as a good strategist. As an N.S.C. administrator, you want someone who can think several moves ahead, who has peripheral vision and an instinct to get where you want to go—someone who can really play the high-stakes game." Nearly a year before Abrams acquired the portfolio for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Rice began bringing him into meetings on the issue.

Relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians had been deteriorating ever since the failure of Bill Clinton's Camp David summit with Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat, in July, 2000. Arafat had rejected what was on the table at Camp David and, even more inexplicably, had made no counter-proposal. In September of that year, Ariel Sharon, then the opposition leader, made a provocative visit to the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem, which is known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary and is the site of the Al Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest shrines. In the weeks afterward, Arafat presided over the armed uprising that came to be known as the Al Aqsa intifada. By the time Sharon became Prime Minister, in February of 2001, the violence had worsened. (Since the beginning of the intifada, some eight hundred Israelis and twenty-three hundred Palestinians have lost their lives.)

Immediately after the September 11th attacks, Sharon and his American supporters began a campaign to equate the American war against Al Qaeda terrorists with Israel's war against Palestinian terrorists. (There are obvious differences: the Palestinians have endured thirty-six years of increasingly harsh Israeli occupation; Israelis live in a climate of apprehension and terror that is unimaginable in the United States.) The following April, Abrams's former colleagues at PNAC—among them Decter, Podhoretz, and Perle—wrote Bush a letter emphasizing that "the United States and Israel share a common enemy," and that "Israel's fight against terrorism is our fight." They urged Bush to accept Sharon's refusal to enter political negotiations until the threat of terror ceased, and to accept his unwilling-



*"Can you start right away?"*

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ness to deal with Yasir Arafat. It was no different, they said, than if Americans were "pressured to negotiate with Osama bin Laden or Mullah Omar."

By then, it was impossible for any American government to continue a laissez-faire policy. After more than a hundred and twenty Israelis were killed in March alone—including twenty-two in a bombing at a Passover Seder, on March 27th—Sharon launched an invasion of Palestinian towns and cities in the West Bank, aiming to root out what he called "the terrorist infrastructure." In Jenin, Israeli infantry, tanks, and bulldozers killed dozens of Palestinians and levelled large parts of a refugee camp.

On June 24, 2002, President Bush gave his first major address on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He had already said that he believed in the principle of a Palestinian state, but now he was going to translate that principle into policy. How he would do so was much debated within the Administration. The office of the Vice-President and the Pentagon were both heavily involved, and they typically took more aggressively pro-Israel positions than the State Department.

The sharpest debate within the Administration concerned Arafat. Colin Powell and others in the State Department had argued that Palestinians and most of the rest of the world saw Arafat as the Palestinian leader, and that they could not simply shunt him aside. Vice-President Cheney's and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's camps had wanted to support Sharon unequivocally in his refusal to deal with Arafat, and Abrams agreed with them. Their view of Arafat was that he had proved after Camp David what they had always said about him: he could not be trusted. They were convinced that he would never forswear the use of terror. Dozens of drafts of Bush's speech were written, and officials from Israel even weighed in, attending several meetings with Rice and others. The most influential Israeli was the former Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky, who is now a minister in the Israeli government. His ties with American conservatives go back to his prison days in Russia, when Senator Jackson's office pressured Moscow to ease emigration from the Soviet Union.

Sharansky believes that democracies cannot trust autocracies. Israel, in his view, should discuss Palestinian statehood only after the Palestinians have developed a democratic system—not just with free elections but with the well-established institutions of a democratic society. "When the Bush Administration came to power, I could see that many of my old friends the neocons were coming out of the dark and into the light," Sharansky told me recently. "All these people, Richard Perle and the rest, who believe in exporting democracy."

In January, 2001, Sharansky had had a long discussion with Cheney in Washington about the peace process. They met again in June, 2002, at an American Enterprise Institute conference in Beaver Creek, Colorado. Perle had asked Sharansky to be the keynote speaker. "I knew Bush's speech was coming, and I was very concerned about it," Sharansky told me. "It was going to be tough on Arafat, but it would say that if he wants to get a state he has to change. Cheney and I went back to all our theories we believed in. I said, 'On top of his terrorist activities, to give Arafat the possibility of a state would be terrible.' Cheney said, 'Your government has already agreed on what we are going to say.' I said, 'I am speaking for myself—but our people will see it as encouraging terrorism.' He asked, 'What do you want?' I said, 'Arafat has to go. A terrorist regime has to go. Then there can be an opportunity for a state,' " Sharansky recalled. "He said he would speak to the President." Four days later, Perle called Sharansky in Israel, and asked if he had heard the speech. "I said, 'No, I was on the plane.' He said, 'Read it—you will hear your voice.' "

In the speech, Bush declared that the Palestinians could have a state only if they removed Yasir Arafat as their leader, put a stop to terrorism, and created a democratic system, instituting economic reforms to end corruption. If they did this, statehood could be conferred in three years' time.

It was King Abdullah of Jordan who proposed the peace plan, at a meeting with Bush in Washington, shortly after the June 24th speech. Flynt Leverett, at the time the acting senior director for Arab-Israeli affairs at the N.S.C., attended the meeting with William Burns, the Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. Leverett told me, "The King said to Bush, 'We need a road map,' and Bush turned to Bill Burns and said, 'Let's see what we can do about that.' " Several months later, when drafts of the plan leaked out, it was criticized by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a lobbyist group, which said that it did not reflect the intent of Bush's June 24th speech. The plan was also criticized by some in Israel, who said that it was worse than the Oslo accord, because it called explicitly for the creation of a Palestinian state, and under the international auspices of the so-called Quartet—the United States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia. Of the four, Israel trusted only the United States.

American officials working on the road map had promised the Quartet partners that the plan would be released before the end of 2002, but Sharon, who was standing for reëlection in January, urged Washington to withhold it until after the election. His request provoked another debate within the usual camps in the Administration. “Elliott argued very, very strongly that we should not put the road map out,” Leverett said. On the morning of December 19th, Abrams and Leverett came to the Oval Office as the President was preparing to call Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak. Bush told them he was hearing from people that the road map was at odds with his speech. Leverett spoke up. “I said, ‘Mr. President, why don’t you take the road map home and read it yourself?’ We sent it to the residence that night, and the next afternoon the President said he thought it was perfectly consistent. He asked, ‘Why are AIPAC and the Israeli Embassy getting their views out, and why aren’t we getting ours out?’ ” Nonetheless, Leverett added, Bush decided to heed the arguments from the Pentagon and the Vice-President’s office rather than the State Department, and not release the road map. Subsequently, Sharon was reëlected by a substantial margin. “We reneged because we didn’t want to make Sharon’s life difficult,” Leverett said. Several weeks later, Leverett, an Arabic-speaking Syria specialist on loan to the N.S.C. from the C.I.A., and a drafter of the road map, was forced out of the N.S.C.

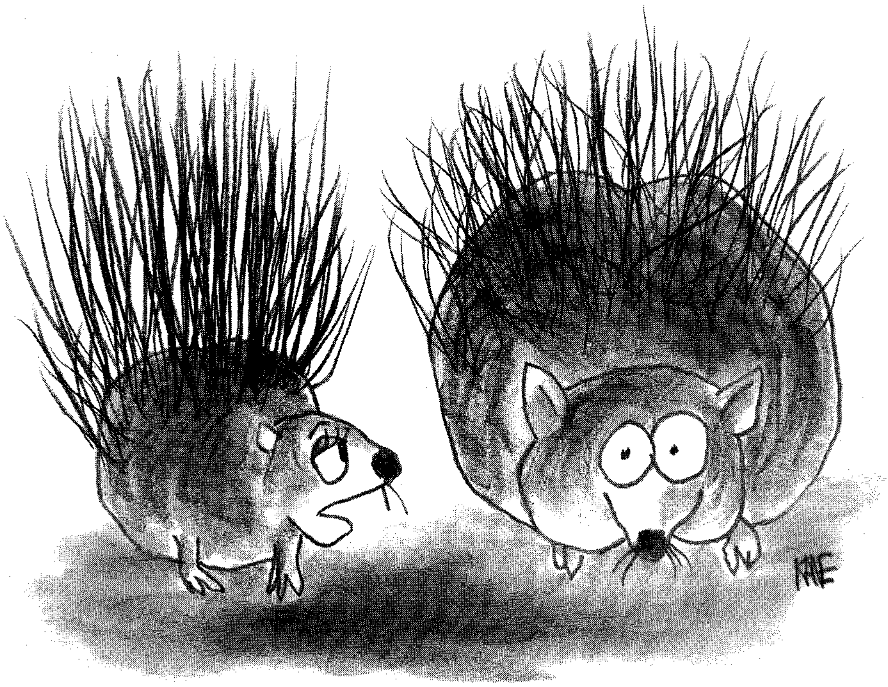
In Israel, where officials monitor shifts in the American political scene like seismographers, the delay in releasing the road map was widely read as confirmation that it was not to be taken seriously. Many Israeli officials disregarded most information from the State Department, relying instead on what they were told by friends at the Pentagon—among them Abrams’s old colleague Douglas Feith, now the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, and a longtime opponent of a Palestinian state. Indeed, one Israeli official told me that some of his colleagues believed that Feith was actually running United States foreign policy. Another Israeli official asserted, “Doug Feith was very much involved in the June 24th speech. Look at the picture on the front page of the New York *Times*—Powell is standing next to Bush, but Rumsfeld is there, too. Why? It was a political speech, not about a war. It gives you a sense of how much more involved the Pentagon is in foreign policy.” And, he continued, Israelis were told by some in the Pentagon that they should not be concerned about the road map. “They were saying, ‘It will vanish! It will disappear! Don’t worry, after Iraq there will be a new Middle East.’ And then,” the official said, referring to speculation that the United States would attack Syria and Iran, “the only question will be, will the U.S. turn left or right?”

It therefore came as a shock in Israel when President Bush announced, on March 14, 2003, that he would release the road map immediately after the confirmation of the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas. Nine months earlier, Bush had called for a change in Palestinian leadership, and now, at least nominally, it had occurred. Arafat was still there, but the post of Prime Minister had been created. Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, was a longtime Arafat associate and a moderate who had been deeply involved in the Oslo negotiations. But he was ill-suited for the gamesmanship of politics, and the question was whether he could disarm the terrorist groups and challenge Arafat to relinquish his remaining control, particularly of the various Palestinian security services.

There were three phases to the plan. The first required a freeze on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the dismantling of settlement outposts built after March, 2001. The Palestinians, while still under Israeli occupation, would have to undertake comprehensive political reform, draft a Palestinian constitution, and hold elections. Most important, they were to dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Only then would the provisional borders of a state be established, as a “way station” in the second phase of the final peace settlement. In the third phase, the most intractable issues—final borders, the Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and the fate of existing Israeli settlements—would have to be resolved.

Many in Israel interpreted Bush’s sudden readiness to proceed with the road map as a demand that had been extracted on the eve of the Iraq war by Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was angry about Bush’s repeated delays. But there was also pressure from the Quartet, and from the Egyptians and the Saudis.

In early April, Sharansky went to Washington to meet with Abrams and Stephen Hadley, the deputy national-security adviser. As the meeting ended, Sharansky recalled, Hadley asked what he thought of the road map. Sharansky, deploring the role to be played by the Quartet, replied that it was dangerous, and a



*“Why won’t you cuddle?”*

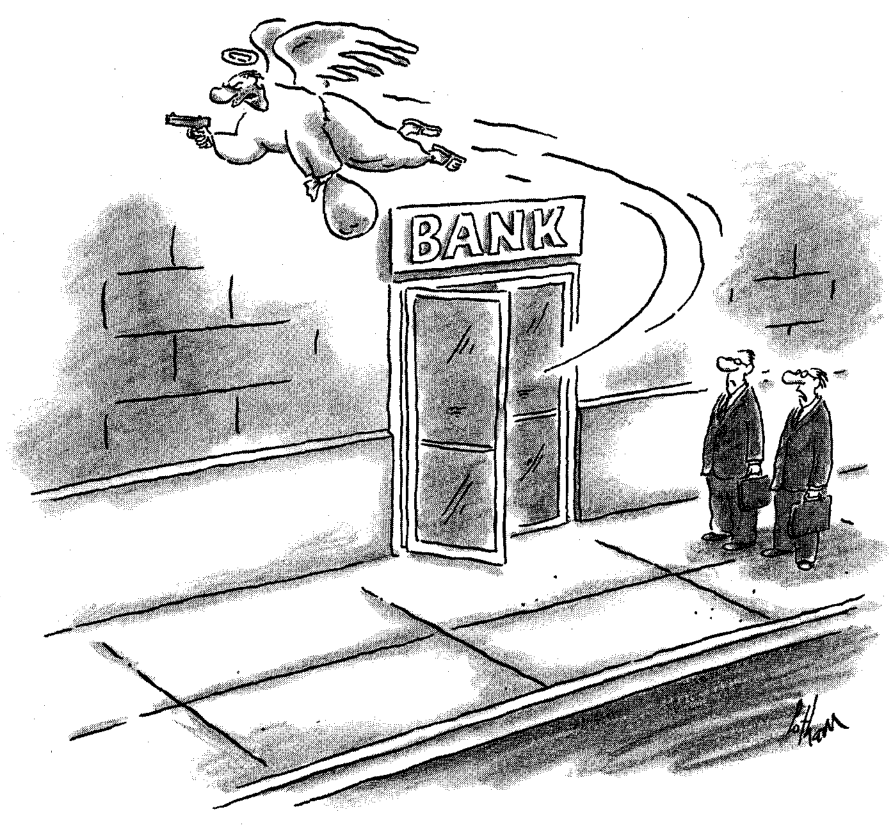
distortion of the President's June 24th speech. "Elliott walked me out," Sharansky continued. "He said to me, jokingly, 'I understand that you have only two small problems with the road map. One is the Quartet, and the other is the road map itself.' I said, 'I hope you will help us solve both.' And he said, 'No, it's not so simple'—and he started backing away from all the neoconservative concerns that he had been pushing for all those years. I didn't want to embarrass him too much, so I said goodbye."

The new distance between Sharansky and Abrams reflected a larger one between President Bush and the hard-line pro-Israel community. Secretary of State Powell was met with boos when he told an AIPAC conference that "settlement activity is simply inconsistent with President Bush's two-state vision." Gary Bauer, the former Republican Presidential candidate, who is a leading Evangelical Christian activist and a good friend of Abrams, received an ovation when he declared, "God owned the land; he gave it to the Jewish people, and neither the U.N. or Russia or any quartets or trios can give away land that does not belong to them but belongs to you."

In Israel, it was the season for recriminations. "The road map calls not only for a Palestinian state but in three years! Sharon had hoped to have a transitional state that would last forever," said Uzi Arad, a close political associate of Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Israeli Prime Minister, who is now a Sharon rival in the Likud. Arad blamed Sharon for sending his chief of staff, Dov Weisglass, rather than an experienced diplomat, to Washington to argue his case.

Weisglass told his colleagues privately that the plan would essentially allow Israel, while appearing to the world to be coöperating in a peace process, to push any painful concessions into the distant future. As Arad put it, "The thinking was, Phase III"—resolving the questions of the Palestinian refugees and the status of Jerusalem—"will never materialize. Phase II seems to be in our favor—we will give them only fifty-two per cent of the land" in provisional borders. But even that seemed unlikely to occur. Arad continued, "Weisglass said to me, 'Look at Phase I,' " which required the Palestinians to control terrorists. " 'It asks that the Palestinians become blue-eyed Scandinavians. We accept! When they become blue-eyed Scandinavians, we'll move on to Phase II.' "

When the plan was formally published, on April 30th, the Palestinians accepted it immediately. Weisglass set out for Washington, where he met for several hours with a large group that included not only Rice, Hadley, and Abrams but also officials from the Pentagon, the office of the Vice-President, and the State Department. The Israelis, who originally had nearly a hundred objections, whittled them to a list of fourteen points.



*"So much for moral clarity."*

After three tempestuous weeks, the Israeli Cabinet voted that, in light of a promise by the United States to eventually address the fourteen points during the process, it would accept "the steps" outlined in the road map. This was a construct that had been devised in negotiations at the N.S.C.—an artful and lawyerly tactic that enabled Sharon to endorse the plan but with ambiguity, so that he could argue to his more right-wing ministers that he had not fully endorsed it. Abrams had worked hard to reach this accommodation. Daniel Ayalon, the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, told me, "Elliott uses very effectively and sophisticatedly his credibility with us. He is an outstanding professional."

The President who brought Sharon and Abbas together to launch the peace plan at the Middle East summit in Aqaba, on June 4, 2003, seemed a very different figure from the one who had derided Clinton's efforts. George Bush had been decidedly non-interventionist when he took office, but September 11th had changed all that, and an aggressive foreign policy was now at the heart of his Administration. Abrams and William Burns had been in the region during the previous two weeks, working with both sides on their speeches. Abbas called for an end to the intifada, and Sharon endorsed a vision of two states living side by side in peace. Colin Powell was there, but so was Condoleezza Rice. The Israelis took her close involvement as another sign that the President now meant business, and some found it unsettling. "Suddenly, Palestinian statehood is the *vision* of the President," one Israeli official complained.

The Palestinians, naturally, were encouraged. They knew that key decisions regarding the road map were being made at the N.S.C., not at the State Department—indeed, they would sometimes find out about them before the State Department did. They had watched Weisglass making his frequent visits to the White House, and the Administration's delays in releasing the road map had convinced them that the process was being heavily influenced by Israel and its ideological allies—a view shared by some in the State Department, who often referred to these allies as "the Six-Pack" (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Feith, Abrams, Wolfowitz, and Perle).

But at Aqaba President Bush met with Prime Minister Abbas and Salam Fayyad, a former representative of the International Monetary Fund, who had been appointed Palestinian Finance Minister by Arafat in June, 2002. "Bush loves him!" an Israeli diplomat told me. When Fayyad, who has a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, first met Bush, "he put up two fingers," the official said, demonstrating. "In the sign for Texas Longhorns! He and Bush got along very, very well."

Martin Indyk, a former American Ambassador to Israel, who held Abrams's position in the Clinton Administration and now heads the Saban Center, at the Brookings Institution, in Washington, agreed. "Salam Fayyad is the perfect person to see George Bush. He's a genuine reformer, he's cleaning up corruption—he's exactly the kind of Palestinian Bush hoped would emerge." Two-thirds of the Palestinian tax revenues flow through Israel; and in December, 2000, Israel—arguing that the money was going to terrorist organizations—had stopped turning the funds over to the Palestinians. But, after Fayyad established a system with controls, Bush insisted to Israel that the funds be released. According to Indyk, Bush told the Israelis, "It's not your money. Why are you holding it in the first place?" Indyk added, "He wants the Palestinians treated fairly." The Israelis released the funds.

According to Amjad Atallah, who was a legal adviser to Abbas, Bush told Abbas and Fayyad that he was upset about the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements. Bush said he knew that some people doubted his willingness to push this initiative and to put pressure on Israel, particularly in an election year. But he insisted that he was going to do so. "He was very adamant," Atallah said. "This convinced Palestinians that Bush was personally committed."

By contrast, Bush's meeting with Sharon at Aqaba did not go well. The total freeze of settlement growth outlined by the road map specifically prohibits what the Israelis call "natural growth"—a loophole that permits settlement expansion within certain parameters. Sharon performed a routine for Bush, as he has for many American officials, saying, "What! No natural growth? Should I tell a pregnant woman living in a settlement to have an abortion?" Bush remarked later, "Does he think I'm ignorant? Does he think I don't know there are vacancies in the settlements?"

"At Aqaba, the President was fully engaged, he had a comfort level with the details—it was quite impressive," Daniel Kurtzer, the American Ambassador to Israel, said. Several American officials with long experience in the region agreed that the President seemed resolute at Aqaba, ready to exploit a potential benefit of the war in Iraq. For now, with the threat of Saddam Hussein gone, Bush could argue forcefully to Sharon that Israel was strong enough to take whatever risks were needed in order to make a deal with the Palestinians.

By the end of June, the road-map initiative seemed to be gaining traction. Abbas won a twelve-week ceasefire from Palestinian militant factions. Israeli officials objected that it was only a *hudna*, a temporary ceasefire; nonetheless, Israel started withdrawing its forces from parts of Gaza. In an effort to strengthen Abbas, the United States urged Israel to take certain good-will steps, including the release of Palestinian prisoners, and decided, for the first time, to give direct economic aid to the Palestinian Authority. It was Abrams who urged key members of Congress not to try to block the aid.

On June 28th, Abrams accompanied Condoleezza Rice to the Middle East, meeting with Abbas and other Palestinian Authority officials in Jericho. It was Rice's first visit to the West Bank—she had no diplomatic or academic experience in the region—but she seemed determined to shed her novice status. "It's like she's become the desk officer on the road map," a Middle East expert in Washington said.

When Rice and Abrams were in Jericho, they met with Stephanie Koury, an American lawyer who is part of a negotiations-support unit for the Palestinians, and saw a presentation on the barrier that Israel is building on the West Bank. Currently about a hundred miles long and up to a hundred yards wide, it is a network of electronic fences, concrete walls, ditches, and guard towers. Israel says that it is building the barrier in order to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel from the West Bank. But the Palestinians point out that it is not being built on the Green Line, which marks the border that existed between Israel and the West Bank before the 1967 war. The barrier extends deep into the West Bank—expropriating land, cutting villages in two, separating farmers from their fields and children from their schools, and making already terrible living conditions more so. If completed according to current plans, it will enclose the Palestinians within an area that amounts to about fifty per cent of the West Bank, and about ninety per cent of the Israeli settlements will remain in place, on the other side of the wall—an arrangement that many in Israel believe to be Sharon's ultimate design.

After seeing Koury's presentation, Rice met with Sharon and raised concerns that the barrier was not being built on the Green Line. An Israeli diplomat told me, "Both Rice and Abrams have been saying it's not a Tom Sawyer fence, it's a wall—and don't tell us that it's not a border!"

It was not so much that the Palestinians were prevailing on key issues—the barrier continued to be built, and not on the Green Line—but that the psychological climate seemed to be changing. Martin Indyk said, "When there's a genuine Palestinian partner and the U.S. decides to engage, then the U.S. moves from being Israel's partner to being in the middle."

In late July, Abbas visited Bush at the White House, hoping that the President would use the occasion to make a strong public statement condemning the settlement expansion and the barrier. "When Abbas showed President Bush a map of the wall," Amjad Atallah said, "he looked at it and then he threw the paper away. He said, 'You'll never have two states with this!' Abbas said, 'Exactly, Mr. President.' " Atallah added that Salam Fayyad and Abbas "were excited about the President being so angry." Later that day, when Bush made his remarks in the Rose Garden, he said, "I think the wall is a problem, and I've discussed it with Ariel Sharon. It is very difficult to develop confidence between the Palestinians and the Israelis with a wall snaking through the West Bank."

The Israelis bristled about the Administration's diplomatic repositioning—and about Abrams's role in particular. The harshest judgment came from Abrams's old ally Sharansky—the person Abrams credits with teaching him the importance of spreading democracy. Sharansky told me that when he first heard about Abrams's appointment he called to congratulate him. "I said, 'It's very great that someone from the school of Senator Jackson and President Reagan is now in power. It's good for the world.'" But now, in the summer of the road map, Sharansky said sharply, "He is being a good *civil servant*."

Weisglass rejected his fellow-Israelis' criticism of Abrams. "He is very fair, candid, open. You know where you stand."

There were many, of course, who welcomed Abrams's apparent ecumenicism. An American official involved in the region told me that he did not know what it would be like to work with Abrams once the final status or "macro issues" were reached. "But on the micro issues—like U.S. assistance of twenty million dollars to the Palestinian Authority—he's helpful, effective, constructive, the best of colleagues." Another American official, who has known Abrams for many years, said, "He was very hawkish on Israel. But I've seen it before. Academics, especially, have a very clear view of an issue, then they get in to government and begin to see that it's not just black and white. . . . I think that's happened with Elliott."

The people who have been involved for many years in what Abrams used to describe, sarcastically, as the "peace process" are congenitally optimistic; and perhaps that characteristic colored some of these individuals' views of Abrams. "If Elliott Abrams is the one to help get Israelis and Palestinians to the endgame, then this is the irony of history," Avi Gil, who was the director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry under Shimon Peres in Sharon's unity government, remarked when I saw him in Jerusalem in mid-August. Gil, a veteran of Oslo, agreed that the implementation of those accords had been flawed, and said he therefore supported the performance-based approach of the road map. "But let us not blur principles with tactics," he said. "On the principles, it's Oslo, a newly improved version. And there is no other way. You have two peoples between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. In about ten years, you will have more Arabs there than Jews. If you want to be a Jewish state and a democratic state, you have to draw a border." He smiled. "Since there is no other solution, the logic of Oslo is alive, and sooner or later we will be on our way back."

To Sharon, however, Oslo was anathema. And he has made it plain in numerous private conversations that he has his own interpretation of the "contiguity," or territorial integrity, that the road map calls for in a future Palestinian state. Sharon envisages discrete Palestinian areas connected by a network of tunnels and bridges. "Peres says, 'It's like paintings by Chagall—angels flying and angels diving,'" Gil said. Sharon has suggested that the Palestinian state would comprise roughly half of the West Bank. And an Israeli official close to Sharon told me, "The Palestinians would like to see a state tomorrow morning, but that cannot be. And this 'provisional state' is clever, because it satisfies that need. So they will have a 'state'—with a flag, passports, whatever," he said, dismissively. And then, as the years go by in peace, "all of a sudden, territorial issues seem a little stupid"—and no longer worth fighting over.

"If you look at it from the Palestinian perspective, they don't trust that Israel will deliver the endgame," Gil said. "What creates the appetite to pay the price is that it will get you to your target at the end of the day. If it is fifty-two per cent of the land, with tunnels and bridges and no real capacity for movement, then what the hell?"

Gil related a story about a man who is given a bulldog, and told that when the dog is three months old its tail must be cut. He soon loves the dog, and cannot bear the thought of its suffering. Crying, he goes to the vet, who explains that it is good for the dog. "So the gentleman says, 'O.K., do it gradually. Cut it a little at a time.'

"This is our predicament," Gil concluded. "We all know what will be the endgame. But we are getting there with the maximum pain, the maximum blood possible."

From the start, the most critical question looming over this initiative concerned not the Israelis or the Palestinians but George Bush. He had seemed genuinely affected by the suffering of the Palestinians and the horror of the terror attacks on the Israelis. But emotion would not suffice. The situation demanded the muscular approach that the Bush Administration has exercised in other areas. Otherwise, the powerful force of inertia on each side would win yet again. Only the American President could prevail on Sharon to dismantle the illegal settlement outposts and freeze settlement growth. And only the President could prevail on Abbas (and, through him, Arafat) to take the crucial step on the Palestinian side—disarming the extremists.

These were difficult measures to adopt. Various Israeli governments, even during the Oslo years, have subsidized settlement growth with financial incentives to settlers. Sharon has long been an architect of the settlements, and he designed their placement both for security reasons and, also, in order to hold the land—an aim that he has evidently not relinquished, except to a minor degree. Since Sharon became Prime Minister, the number of settlement outposts has doubled, and the number of settlers has increased by nearly twenty per cent. In all, there are some two hundred and thirty thousand settlers and approximately a hundred settlement outposts. It is the settlements' explosive growth that has convinced Palestinians that Israel has no intention of withdrawing to the Green Line and allowing them a viable state. Thus, there was no more powerful message that the Israelis could have sent to the Palestinians than dismantling illegal outposts and freezing settlement growth. And if Abbas, the leader of a people still under occupation, were to attack the Palestinian extremists, not only would he risk being seen as Israel's enforcer but he might also trigger a civil war—one that he could well lose. Still, there was no more compelling message that the Palestinians could have sent to the Israelis,

*"This is a 'warts and all' biography with some really great warts."*

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as evidence of their desire to abjure violence in favor of peace.

In August, the Administration's attention was diverted by the worsening situation in Iraq, and the life seemed to go out of the peace process. Abbas did not suppress the militant factions. Israel dismantled, with great fanfare, only a handful of illegal settlement outposts; settlers immediately built others. As for the settlement freeze—and Sharon's pitch for "natural growth," which had angered Bush at Aqaba—that was quietly finessed, and by none other than Bush's lieutenant, Elliott Abrams.

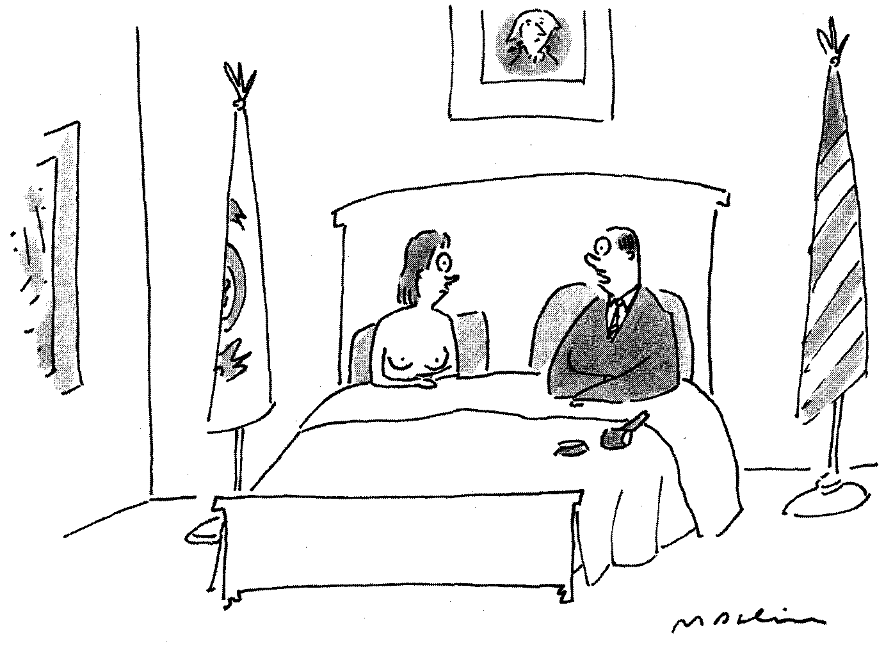
From the time of Abrams's appointment, the Israelis had been concerned about his attitude toward the settlements. Unlike Feith, who is an ardent supporter of the settlements and whose former law partner, L. Marc Zell, has been a spokesman for the settlers' movement in the West Bank, Abrams had expressed some reservations about them. But, during his trip to Israel before the *Commentary* dinner in May, he and Stephen Hadley were given Sharon's ritual helicopter tour over the West Bank, accompanied by the usual discourse. "It was 'Settlements 101,' and it was very effective," an Israeli official said.

"We sat with Abrams in a quiet way, trying to get a formula," the official continued. Ultimately, they agreed on a definition of natural growth that would allow for limited expansion. Another Israeli official told me, when I interviewed him in August, "We now have a clear understanding, regarding a limited form of construction, that solves the problem."

This was, however, a private understanding, between Abrams and the Israelis, which neither the Palestinians nor some of his colleagues in the State Department knew about. Thus, while Abrams was playing a visible role that heartened those colleagues, he struck a deal with the Israelis that weakened a key element of the peace plan—and on an issue about which the President is said to have had little sympathy with the Israeli position.

In early September—just three months after Bush's peacemaker début at Aqaba—Abbas resigned as Prime Minister, and the initiative effectively shut down. The region had been engulfed in a round of violence in previous weeks—the Israelis carried out targeted assassinations of Palestinian militants, and, in retaliation, on August 19th a Hamas terrorist blew up a bus in Jerusalem, killing almost two dozen people. Abbas, who had shown considerable courage in his unequivocal condemnation of violence and who had taken Bush at his word, was bitter—he blamed Israel and Arafat, but also the Bush Administration, for undermining him. President Bush assigned full blame to the Palestinians, for their failure to control terror. When King Abdullah of Jordan came to see him in late September, Bush is said to have told him, "I'm not spending any more political capital on losers, the Palestinians—only on winners."

Abbas was not alone in faulting the Bush Administration. "We did nothing!" Martin Indyk said. "*We* lost Abu Mazen"—Abbas—"and the moral clarity of his saying terrorism is bad. The issue that mattered was giving the Palestinian people the sense that Abu Mazen could deliver—on prisoner releases, on checkpoints, on the dismantling of settlement outposts, on bettering their economic situation. Instead of offering fifty million dollars, we should have offered two hundred and fifty million dollars. We should have been concentrating pressure on Arafat to give up his control of the security services, and we should have built up those security services." There should have been a real monitoring system, he continued, in which the United States envoy worked out serious steps that Sharon and Abbas would take, and deployed large teams to make sure these steps were being taken. "Instead," he concluded, "we just left them to their own devices. And now the Bush Administra-



*"Remember, Ms. Harkins, you're still under oath."*

• •

tion is quite satisfied to let the Israelis and Palestinians wallow in their misery—and blame the Palestinians."

However diligently Abrams had been carrying out the President's policy, it now fell into an extended hiatus, and he seemed altogether comfortable. To Abrams, Arafat had always been irredeemable; now Arafat had once again proved him right. The Administration's position, essentially, was that, since there was no one to deal with on the Palestinian side but Arafat, there was little to do. Yet events on the ground continued. In late September, a Palestinian official went to see Abrams. The Palestinians had been hearing that the Israelis and the Americans were negotiating about the route the barrier would take through the West Bank. "I said to Elliott Abrams, 'We appreciate Dr. Rice's comments"—to Sharon—"and what the President said"—to Abbas and Fayyad—"in July. But is this true, what we've been hearing?' " the official told me. "I had found he was always honest, straightforward—if he didn't want to tell you something, he'd just be quiet. And he said, 'I'll tell you what it is that we're actually negotiating with the Israelis. We're discussing the number of gates in the fence, how they'll be operated, what hours they'll be open.' " Abrams also said they were discussing the location of three further segments of the barrier. The Palestinian told him that he was concerned about the rapid pace of construction of the barrier, and rumors he had been hearing about Sharon's plans. "I painted this scenario for Elliott: Sharon's policy now seems to be clearly designed to complete as much of the wall as possible by next summer, and to have Palestinians cordoned off into one main ghetto"—within about forty-two per cent of the West Bank. "And he might then call it Phase II of the road map—and even, under pressure, call it a state. Elliott simply smiled and said, 'I can see why you would think that.' "

When Israelis in the opposition met with Abrams and urged that the United States pressure Israel to take some action that would push the peace plan forward, they received no encouragement from him. "People are saying, 'Why bother with Abrams?' " one American active in the region said, referring to Israelis and Palestinians who had stopped requesting meetings with Abrams in favor of meeting with Rice, Hadley, Powell, Burns, and Wolfowitz. "Anybody who wants to move forward feels that Abrams is not an ally but an opponent."

For Abrams, personally, the road map had been anything but a failure. He had metamorphosed from the strident ideologue of the eighties into a diplomat, managing to disarm even some who were initially suspicious of him. At the same time, in the view of his old compatriots, he had delivered.

Daniel Pipes, who is known for his studies of Islamic extremism and his hard-line views on Israel, explained when I spoke to him in September that he had never doubted Abrams. Pipes said he had strongly opposed the peace plan, and he had gone to Washington in early July to meet with Abrams and others in the Administration to discuss it. "Elliott persuaded me of the modesty of their intentions, which to me was the key. If I'd heard that the U.S. was going to really bring pressure to bear, bash heads, make it work, I would have opposed it. But what he in particular said was 'No. We think we have an idea. If it works, great; if not, we'll reassess.' I was told, 'We have a shot at peace—the odds are not that good.' " Pipes added that Feith played an important role in delivering the same message to others in the pro-Israel community—telling them, essentially, to hold their fire.

With the United States turned away from the peace effort, some Israelis and Palestinians tried to take matters into their own hands. By early December, two unofficial peace initiatives were gaining popular ground. One was a statement of principles for a two-state solution, produced by Ami Ayalon, a former chief of Israel's Shin Bet security service, and Sari Nusseibeh, a Palestinian university president; it has been signed by more than a hundred thousand Israelis and sixty-five thousand Palestinians thus far. The other was a detailed draft of an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty known as the Geneva Accord, negotiated over two and a half years by a group of Israelis and Palestinians, including some of Israel's most noted military and intelligence leaders. A signing ceremony was held in Geneva last week. In contrast to the incremental approaches of Oslo and the road map, Geneva leapt to resolve the difficult "final" issues: Israel would retain many of its settlements, giving the Palestinians land in compensation; the Palestinians (with some exceptions) would give up the right of return, and receive financial compensation; Jerusalem would be the capital of both nations, with sovereignty over the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Temple Mount passing to the Palestinians.

More than anything else, these initiatives countered the idea that there was no one to talk to on the other side—the idea, promulgated most effectively by Sharon, that brought him to power and has kept him there. On November 1st, about a hundred thousand Israelis turned out for a peace rally in Yitzhak Rabin Square, in Tel Aviv, at a memorial ceremony marking the anniversary of Rabin's assassination—the largest turnout of that kind in Israel in the past three years. A poll in November showed that fifty-three per cent of Israelis supported a two-state solution along the lines of the Geneva Accord. And the chief of staff of the Israeli military, Lieutenant General Moshe Yaalon—known as the hardest of the hard-liners—told the press that Israel's failure to ease travel restrictions and curfews on the Palestinians had not only contributed to the fall of Abbas but also harmed Israel's security. In an article written by Nahum Barnea in *Yediot Ahronot* on October 29th, Yaalon was quoted as saying that Israel's punitive policy "increases hatred for Israel and strengthens the terror organizations." And two weeks later four former Israeli security chiefs, in a joint press interview, excoriated Sharon's tough military approach to the Palestinians as shortsighted and futile, and called for a political resolution.

Sharon was said to be furious at all his critics. He suggested that the Geneva negotiators were traitors, "coördinating their actions with the Palestinians behind the government's back" at a time when Israel was "engaged in a difficult campaign against terror." The ferocity of Sharon's response indicated the pressure he was under, which was personal as well as political. He and his two sons are targets of a corruption investigation, and Sharon was recently grilled for seven hours by police. His approval ratings, moreover, have dropped precipitately; thirty-three per cent of Israelis approve of him, fifty-nine per cent disapprove.

But Sharon, a skilled and canny politician, began talking about getting back to the peace process. In late November, after Ahmed Qurei, also known as Abu Ala, the new Palestinian Prime Minister, formed a government, Sharon began sending him messages about arranging a meeting. Abu Ala, who was a key Palestinian negotiator in Oslo, is a more accomplished politician than Abu Mazen, and he has been taking Sharon's measure for a long time. In early 2000, when I saw Abu Ala in Ramallah, he told me, rather defiantly, "I am not afraid of Ariel Sharon." He then added, with a little less bravura, "Sharon is deep, deep as the sea."

As the parties began to maneuver their way back to negotiations, the Bush Administration seemed to refocus, however tentatively, on the conflict, and on Sharon. While the peace process has been stalled, construction of the barrier and expansions to settlements have moved aggressively forward. The government of Israel has approved the construction of more than seventeen hundred new houses in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip this year; as for the unauthorized outposts, Sharon has suggested that some of them might soon be legitimatized. In mid-November, Abrams travelled to Rome to meet with Sharon, and urged him to heed American concerns—mainly, according to an Israeli official, by starting to dismantle the outposts. The same week that Abrams met with Sharon, President Bush underscored the message, in a speech he delivered in London, saying, "Israel should freeze settlement construction, dismantle unauthorized outposts, end the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people, and not prejudice final negotiations with the placements of walls and fences." The Administration announced that it would deduct two hundred and ninety million dollars (from a total of nine billion) in loan guarantees to Israel, in order to penalize it for constructing the barrier and building settlements. (One American politician, close to Israel, characterized this move as "a slap on the wrist.")

A couple of days after the ceremony for the Geneva Accord, it was reported that its primary authors were to meet with Abrams, Burns, and Powell. The development seemed, at first, surprising. The Bush Administration had kept a scrupulous distance from the Geneva Accord. Was the meeting meant as a prod to Sharon? Or had the Administration officials recognized, privately, the weakness of their approach the last time around, and were they now open to new ideas?

When I asked an Administration official last week why its efforts had slackened after the summer, he said, "The answer is, for several months the Palestinians haven't had a Cabinet, haven't had a Prime Minister. Now they do. And now we're seeing a much more rapid pace of diplomacy." When I asked the official whether it might be preferable to proceed to the endgame, as the Geneva plan does, he emphatically replied that it would not be preferable, "because the endgame is negotiation between the Palestinian Authority and the government of Israel—and shortcuts or sideshows don't do that. It has got to be responsible, empowered people negotiating, and that's not Geneva. That's the road map. I understand the impatience, because we'd all like it to happen faster. But we believe that there are no shortcuts—that you have got to do what the road map says, in part to build confidence, which is sorely lacking on each side." When I asked him to envision an ideal scenario, the official said, "Now you've got a Palestinian Prime Minister who's got to engage with Sharon. Both sides have responsibilities that we are talking to them about privately—about the things we think need to be done, publicly and privately, early on, to get things going again. So we get to the point at which we left off very fast: where Israel is beginning to pull out of Gaza, pull out of Palestinian cities, turn over security responsibilities on things that affect Palestinian day-to-day life—checkpoints, border crossings, freedom of movement, and the economic impact on Palestinian life. You begin to see changes, you begin to see the Palestinians doing something that didn't happen last time. Which is really to begin to act against terror.

"We get that started again, and I think you'll begin to build some momentum. And the hope, of course, is that as you build that momentum Abu Ala can show the Palestinians, 'Hey, this is better. You don't really want to go back to the intifada, do you? That was not better, that was much worse. Not just for the Israelis, but for us.' "

The official said that what made the road-map plan signally different from Oslo, in addition to its being performance-based, was that the road map called not just for a Palestinian state but a democratic Palestinian state. "Borders are not as critical as what is within the borders," he said. "What is the nature of the state? Is it a terrorist state? Or is it a state that has vanquished terrorism? Is it a democratic state? What are we creating? That's what's vital."

The official emphasized that he doesn't make policy himself but merely carries out the President's instructions. "We *have* a policy," he said. "It was elucidated on June 24th and at various times since. Our view is that the June 24th speech is the Bible. All the rest is commentary." ◆

FICTION

# RECUPERATION

BY RODDY DOYLE

He walks. Every day, he walks. That was what the doctor had said. All the doctors. Plenty of exercise, they'd told him. It was the one thing he'd really understood.

—Are you a golf man, Mr. Hanahoe?

—No.

—Hill walking.

—No.

—Do you walk the dog?

—No dog.

He'd buried the dog a few years ago, in the back garden.

—We'll have to get you exercising.

—O.K.

He walks now, every day. Sundays, too. He hadn't even liked the dog. He walks, the same way. Except maybe when it was a pup, and the kids were younger. Every day, the same way. The way he went the first day. Up the Malahide Road.

Hanahoe walks.

When the dog died, the kids were upset, but not upset enough to go out in the rain and dig the grave. The dog had been dying for years; the kids were living most of their time outside the house. It had been up to Hanahoe.

He starts at the Artane roundabout, his back to town, facing Malahide.

He starts.

He'd have waited till it stopped raining, but it didn't seem right, and it had been raining for days. So he dug in the dark. It was easy work, the ground was so wet. The spade sank nicely for him. And he dug up a rabbit. He saw it in the torchlight. A skeleton. He'd buried the rabbit years before, before the dog, after the goldfish.

It takes him ten minutes to get to the Artane roundabout, but he doesn't count that. The walk starts, the exercise starts, when he's on the corner of Ardlea Road and the Malahide Road.

He had meant to tell the kids about the rabbit. He threw it back in, on top of the dog. He'd meant to tell them about it the next morning, before work and school. It was the only time they were all together in the house. But, he remembers now as he walks, he never did tell them. And he didn't throw the rabbit in. He lowered it on the spade, and let it slide off, onto the dog. He forgot to tell them. He thinks he forgot. He's not sure.

ZOHAR LAZAR

There are other places he could walk. There are plenty of places. He could get in the car and drive to St. Anne's or Bull Island, or the path along the coast, or even out to Howth. But he doesn't. He's not sure why, just certain that he won't. But that's not true. He does know why; he knows exactly why. It's people. Too many people.

He got out of the habit of talking. As the kids were getting older. He put a stone slab, left over from the patio, over the dog's grave, and then remembered that there was no dog now to dig it up. There was no need for the slab. Another thing he was going to tell the kids, and didn't.

This is the stretch that Hanahoe has chosen. Starting outside the old folks' flats. Mount Dillon Court. He's never seen anyone coming out of there. Old or young—a milkman or Garda, a daughter, grandchild. No one. And that suits him. He'd stop looking if he saw anyone.

—Do you get down to the pub at all?

—No.

—The golf club.

—You asked me that the last time. No.

He used to. He went to the pub now and again. Once a week, twice. Sometimes after Mass. She came, too. He thought she'd liked it. He'd always thought that. A pint for him, something different for her. Gin-and-tonic, vodka-and-something, Ballygowan, Baileys. She'd never settled on one drink. And he doesn't remember ever thinking there was anything wrong with that.

He walks past the old cottages. They're out of place there, on the dual carriageway. He walks beside the cycle path. To the newer houses. They're on a road that runs beside the main road. They're well back and hidden, behind old hedges and trees. If people look out at him passing every day, he doesn't care, and he doesn't have to. He doesn't know them, and he won't. He walks on the grass. The ground is hard. It hasn't rained in a long time.

He wears tracksuit bottoms. She bought them for him. They were in a bag at the end of the bed when he got home from the hospital. Champion Sports. Two tracksuits. A blue and a gray. He doesn't wear the tops. And he won't. He doesn't know when she moved into their daughters' bedroom; he's not sure, exactly. It was empty for a while. After the eldest girl moved out, and then her sister. And then she'd moved in, after a few months. He has trainers as well, which he got himself after he came home. The first time he went out, up to Artaine Castle. There was no row or anything when she moved into the girls' room. He doesn't think there was. He woke up one night and she wasn't there. And the next night he felt her getting out of bed. It was too hot, she said. The night after that, she said nothing. The night after, she went straight to the girls' room. A few years ago. Two, three. The trainers still look new. She never came back to their room. And he never asked why not. He's been wearing them for a month now. They still look new-white. It annoys him.

Past Chanel Road. Past the *Rampaí* sign. He's at the turnoff for Coolock. He looks behind, checks for cars. He's clear, he crosses. Chanel to the left, the school. The kickboxing sign on the gate pillar. "Juniors and Seniors, Mondays and Fridays." They'd nothing like that when his kids were younger. Kickboxing. Martial arts. Skateboarding. Nothing like that—he thinks.

Hanahoe crosses the road.

—Are you a joiner?

—What?

—Do you join? Clubs. Societies.

—No.

—No, yet, or no, never?

He doesn't answer. He shrugs.

He used to be. He thought he was. A joiner. The residents, the football. Fund-raising, bringing kids to the matches. He did it. He did them all. He'd enjoyed it. Then his sons stopped playing, and he stopped going. Less people to talk to—it just happened that way. He didn't miss it at the time. He doesn't miss it now.

He passes the granite stone, "Coolock Village" carved into it. "Sponsored by Irish Shell Ltd., 1998." He's behind the petrol station, the secondhand cars, against the back wall. Behind the chipper, and Coolock Glass. A high wall, there's nothing to see. To his right, the traffic. Too early for the rush, but it's heavy enough. He wonders what kickboxing is like, what kickboxing parents are like. He hasn't a clue. He's at the church now, the car park. There's nothing on—funeral, wedding—no one there. He enjoyed the football. He liked the men who ran the club—he remembers that, he remembers saying it. There was a trip to Liverpool—the car, the ferry. Three kids in the back, another father beside him. That had been good. A good weekend. Liverpool had won. Against Ipswich or Sunderland. Some team like that.

He's doing well. He's not tired. It's hot. It might rain. Another high wall, the backs of more houses. He has to bend under branches. Southampton. A bus passes, knocks warm air against him. Liverpool beat Southampton. The bus swerves in, to the stop in front of him. A woman gets off. She walks away. She's faster than him; he won't see her face. She wears trainers, like his.

He stopped going to Mass. She still goes. As far as he knows. He stopped going when the kids stopped. He's coming up to the crossroads. There's one of the Africans there, selling the *Herald*. Walking between the cars at the lights. He's never seen anyone buy one. But the Africans are there, every day.

He can cross; the light is green for him. Cadbury's, down to the left. More houses, in off the road. He hated Mass, the whole thing. Always did. Standing up, sitting down. Most Sundays. Or Saturday nights, when they started that. Getting it over with.

He's at the back of Cadbury's now. It's like a park. Greenhouses and all. It's like the countryside here, the little river, the trees. What it must have been like. But not in his memory. It was always like this.

It's depressing, a life, laid out like that. Mass, driving the kids to football, or dancing. The pint on Friday. The sex on Sunday. Pay on Thursday. The shop on Saturday. Leave the house at the same time, park in the same spot. The loyalty card. The bags. The routine. One day he knew: he hated it.

His mother worked in Cadbury's when he was a kid. Christmas and Easter. The cinema across the road. The UCI. He hasn't been to the pictures in years. She used to bring home Easter eggs, the ones that were out of shape, no use for the shops. He brought one into school. His lunch. King of the world that day. He can't remember the last film he went to. He's starting to sweat. Fine. That's exercise. That's what they want. He can smell the Tayto factory. It's not too bad today. Clouds gathering, ahead. Getting ready. It's hot. "Michael Collins." The last film he went to. But that's a long time ago. He's sure he's been since then. He looks across at the UCI. But he can't read the names of the films. Too far away. He hasn't a clue what's on, what's big. No kids at home now. He's going past the paint factory. He thinks it's a paint factory. Akzo Nobel. Berger, Sandtex, Sadolin. She doesn't go to the pictures, either. He doesn't think she does. She didn't like "Michael Collins." He did.

More country cottages. And more behind them, old lanes, warehouses. He's coming up to Woodie's. She meets her friends when she goes out—he thinks. She still tells him, sometimes. Before she goes. Tells him she's going. Who she's meeting. A gang of women she's known for years. He knows them all. He knows their husbands. They used to go out together, the men and the women. It wasn't too bad. Not now, though, not in years. Maybe she goes to the pictures with them. He doubts it. She'd tell him. It's not that they never talk. She went to a play, a few months back. In town. She told him. Something like that, she'd tell him. He'd tell her. It's not that bad.

He hates Woodie's. Not the shop. He sees the need—wood, paint. He opens his jacket. It's a bit too hot now. He's fine. He's grand. The heart is calm. It's not the products. It's the idea. The D.I.Y. The people who live in the place at the weekend. Haunting the aisles. And the other shops over there. Classic Furniture. Right Price Tiles. "Tile Your Bathroom for €299." The pet shop's gone. The big place. He used to go there with the kids. She'd come with them. They laughed when they realized: it was a family outing. Nearer than the zoo. Ice cream on the way home. The kids were delighted. The innocence. It was lovely.

He looks behind. Before he crosses. It's usually busy. Nothing coming; he doesn't have to stop. The McDonald's is new. Toymaster. PC Superstore. And Lidl. Only open a week. Some kind of supermarket. The car park is fuller, packed since it opened.

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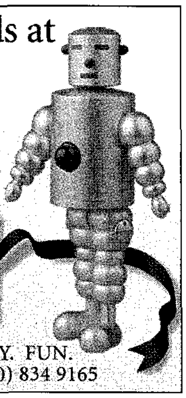

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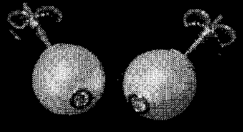

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## ON THE DEATH OF A CAT

In life, death
was nothing
to you: I am

willing to wager
my soul that it
simply never occurred

to your nightmareless
mind, while sleep
was everything

(see it raised
to an infinite
power and perfection)—no death

in you then, so now
how even less. Dear stealth
of innocence

licked polished
to an evil
lustre, little

milk fang, whiskered
night
friend—

go.

—*Franz Wright*

He doesn't know when it changed. He doesn't know when he knew. Before she moved out of the bedroom. They stopped talking. There was nothing dramatic.

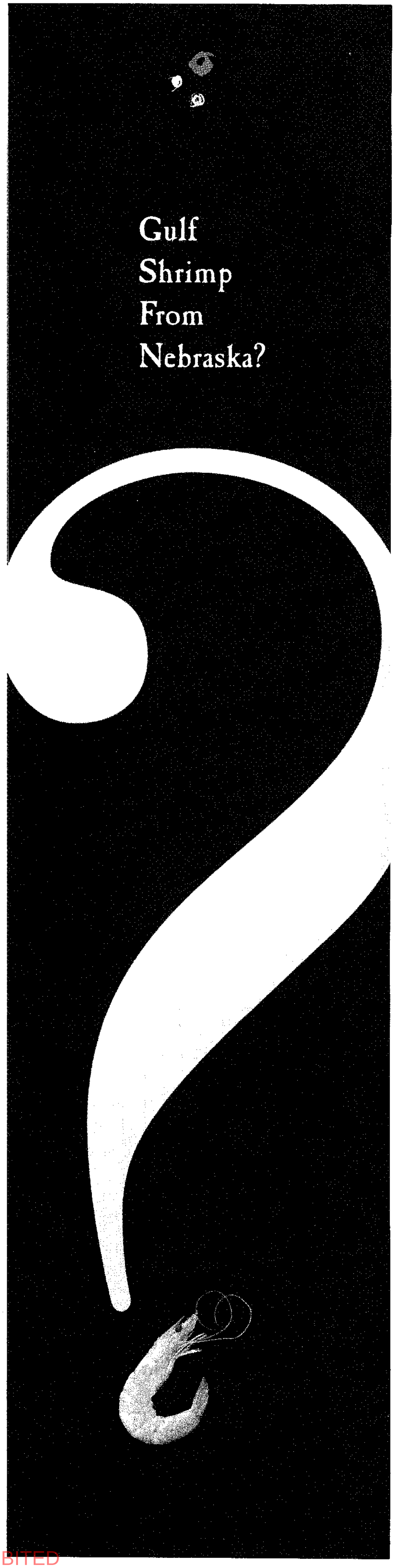
He's been living alone for years. He doesn't know what happened. There was no shouting, very little. There was no violence. No one was hit. No one played away from home. He didn't. She didn't.

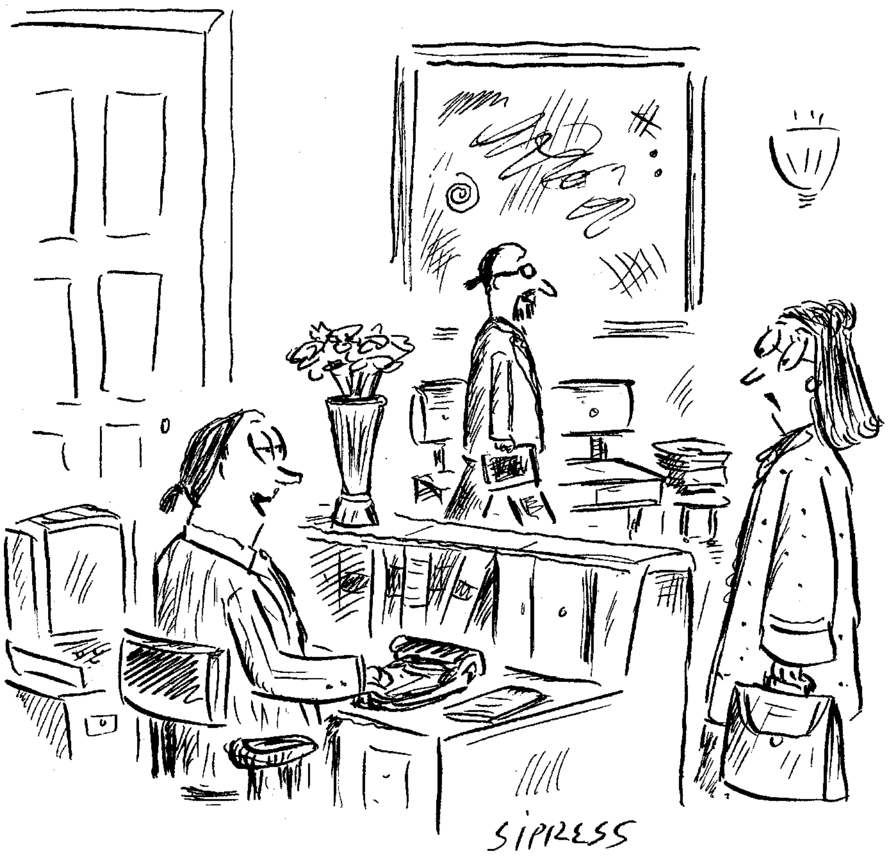
There was a Christmas do. He's coming up to the Texaco station. The pub is behind it. Newtown House. Two doors, no windows. The Belcamp Inn, it used to be called—he thinks. The only place, the only time he was ever in a fight. In the days when he took his time coming home. He looks behind, crosses the turn for the industrial estate. Friday night. He knocked into a guy at the bar. Not really a fight. Just a couple of digs—he was too scared to feel them. Then too scared to leave.

That Christmas do. A young one who'd just started in the job a few weeks before. His leg had touched hers, sitting together. He was surprised when she didn't move. A bit scared. Her leg pressed against his. Nothing sexy about it. Nice, though. The thought. Then they'd met in the corridor. Him going to the toilet, her coming back. They smiled. He stopped. She didn't. Then she did. He put his hands on her. They kissed. Rubbed each other. He was bursting, full of drink. They stopped. He went to the jacks, came back, and it never happened. That was it.

That was all. He never told anyone.

He looks. Cars coming up behind him. He waits, and crosses the station entrance. It's not as fancy as those new forecourts going up everywhere. Mar-





*"While you were out, tiny ponytails came back."*

• •

tina. Good-looking girl. She was young. But so was he.

That was all.

He doesn't know what happened. Or what he'd say, how he'd bring it up, after this long.

—What went wrong?

He could never say that.

—What happened?

She'd look at him. He'd have to explain. Where would he start? He hadn't a clue. And the question would announce it—the end. They'd have to admit it. And one of them would have to go.

Him.

But he's alone already. He knows the last time he spoke to someone. This morning. Getting the paper. The woman behind the counter.

—Nice day again.

—Yeah.

That was it. A nice woman. Attractive. His age. A bit younger. He's coming up to the Darndale roundabout. He never looked at women his age. Until recently. They were always too old. Not really women; ex-women. Now, though, he looks. But he doesn't. Not really. He doesn't know what he'd do if a woman spoke to him.

—Nice day again.

—Yeah.

What else could he say? He isn't interested. He's used to himself. He's fine. He's come to the roundabout. He'll go on. He isn't tired. He crosses. Darndale to the left. Rough spot. He's never been in there. He runs the last bit, trots—to the other side. He's fine.

It's dark, very quickly. Like four hours gone, in a second. And cold, and it's raining. He goes on. He closes his jacket. It's bucketing. There's an inch of sudden water. He can't see far. The traffic noise has changed; it's softer, menacing.

Who's to blame? No one. It just happened. It's too late now. He can't pull them back, his wife, the kids. They have their own lives. She does; they do. Maybe grandkids will do something. If there are any. He doesn't know. He knows nothing. He feels nothing. He doesn't even feel sorry for himself. He doesn't think he does.

He's fine. He copes.

But this is stupid. It's lashing, no sign of sunlight. He's cold. His feet are wringing. He turns back. He can feel the water down his back. It annoys him, giving up, but he's—not sure—reassured, or something. He can change his mind. He's prepared to.

He makes it to the bus shelter. Across the Malahide Road. A break in the traffic. He goes through the water. He's fine. In under the shelter. A gang of young guys. Fuckin' this, fuckin' that. Rough kids. Too skinny, too fat. Not really kids. One of them pushes him. Bangs against him. An accident. No apology. They laugh. They shove one another out from the shelter.

He'll go. But one of them steps out, shouts. A taxi stops. They pile in. One slips. They laugh. They're gone.

There's one kid left there. A girl. Eight, nine—he's not sure. White tracksuit. Mousy hair, beads in it. She's chewing gum. His own kids were scared of gum, when they were little. His fault—he was always afraid of them choking. She's chewing away. He can hear her.

The rain is dying.

She speaks.

—I'm waitin' on me mammy.

He's surprised. He says nothing, at first.

—Where is she?

—At her work, she says. Comin' home.

—On the bus?

—Yeah.

—That's nice.

—Yeah.

He puts his hand out.

—The rain's stopping.

—It was badly needed, she says.

He smiles.

—You're dead right, he says.

The ground is already steaming. He shakes water from his jacket.

—I'll go on, he says. Will you be all right there by yourself?

—Ah yeah, she says. I'm grand.

—Good, he says. Well. Seeyeh.

—Seeyeh.

The rain is gone. It's bright again. He walks.

Nice kid. He smiles.

Hanahoe walks home. ♦

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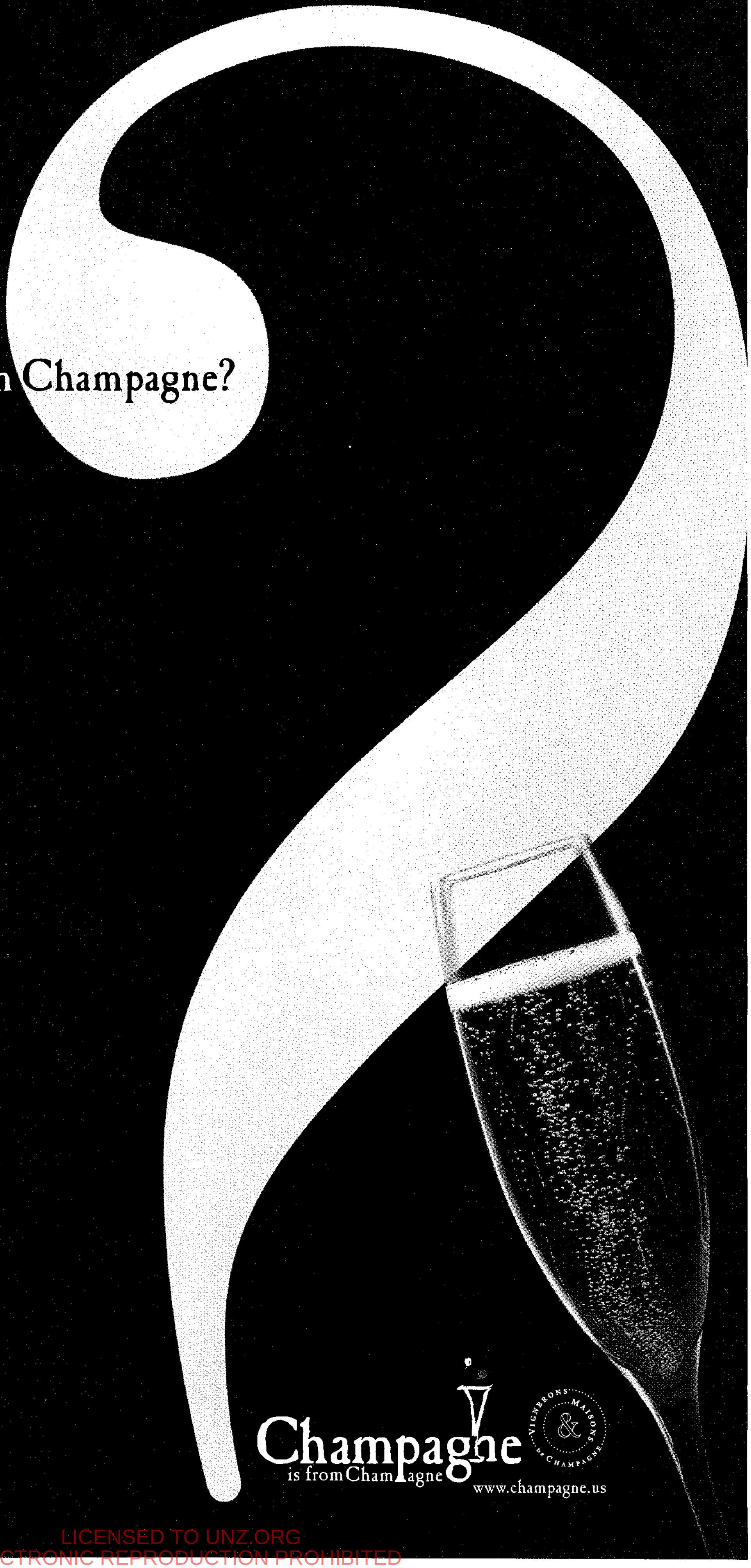
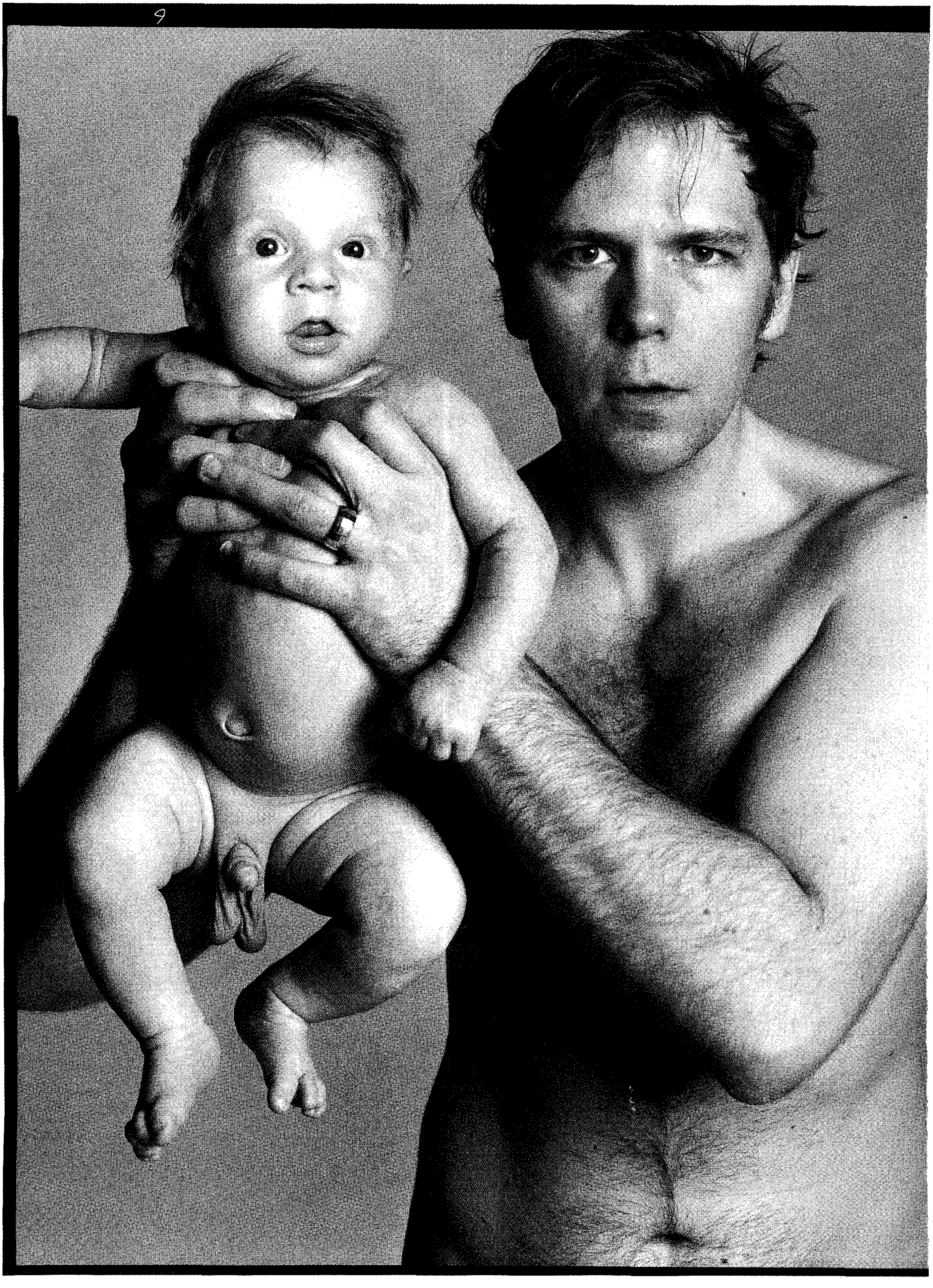
And, if it's not from Champagne, it's simply not true Champagne.

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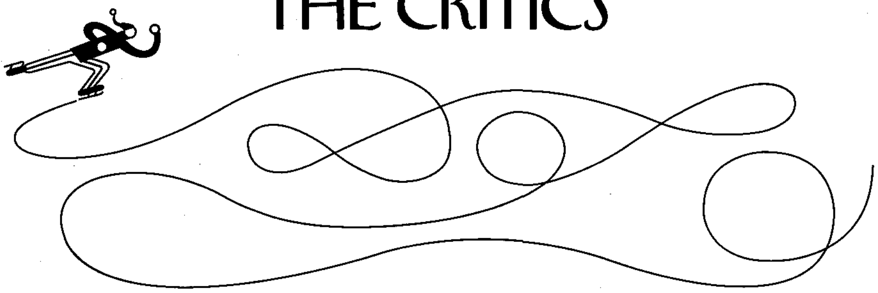
# THE CRITICS



## THE ART WORLD

# IRRESISTIBLE

*John Currin at the Whitney.*

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The soaring fame of John Currin, the forty-one-year-old satiric and surrealistic painter, whose sparkling mid-career retrospective has come to the Whitney Museum by way of Chicago and London, surprises me, and I'm a longtime Currin enthusiast. A New Yorker originally from California, he made a small stir with his commercial-gallery début, in 1992, which featured acrid fantasy portraits of menopausal women—images suspended, in his words, "between the object of desire and the object of loathing." Subsequent shows attracted lukewarm and often annoyed, though oddly compulsive, critical attention. I assumed that Currin's skilled, sly, ineffably old-fashioned work—pastiches of Old Masters and hack illustration, in easel paintings fit for a bygone Beaux-Arts salon—would remain a renegade taste, marginal to video, photography, installations, and other dominant, paint-allergic modes of contemporary art.

But to resist Currin's claim to preëminence in art's present state and near-future course suddenly seems beyond anyone's ability. A formerly ill-disposed curator told me that, at the Whitney show, "I kept trying to figure out why I don't dislike him anymore." Even the art critic Kim Levin, of the *Village Voice*, whose outraged response to Currin's "awful" work, in 1992—"Boycott this show"—has pursued her through innumerable discussions of the artist, capitulates, sort of, in a recent column. "But Currin's subsequent œuvre reveals an artist whose work is something other than merely misogynistic, sexist, and ageist," Levin now allows. Thus do the anathemas of the politically correct give way, even as Currin's distinctly male political antagonism continues apace.

Here are exhibits for an inquest into Currin's popularity:

"Mary O'Connel" (1989). An unhappy blond teen from what might be a high-school yearbook photo. There is something sexually demonic about her.

"Bea Arthur Naked" (1991). Bea Arthur naked.

"Nadine Gordimer" (1992). A realistic portrait of the author, employing the motif of a David Levine caricature: an enormous head on a vestigial body. She's a monster.

"Ms. Omni" (1993). A skinny, leathery, over-the-hill Park Avenue divorcée type, with haplessly gallant mien.

"The Neverending Story" (1994). A morose, dapperly bearded man—perhaps the guru of a failing hippie cult—is regarded worshipfully by a girl young enough to be his daughter. Against a summer sky that evokes Tiepolo.

"The Bra Shop" (1997). Two sweatered girls with humongous breasts. One intently tape-measures the mammaries of the other, who simpers with bashful pride.

"Three Friends" (1998). Elegantly intertwined, anatomically preposterous nudes in the Northern Renaissance manner of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Their faces suggest fatuous American girls.

"Homemade Pasta" (1999). A gay couple in aprons blissfully operate their new kitchen aid.

"Hobo" (1999). A scantily clad, sumptuous lass wields attributes of poverty. Paging Marie Antoinette.

"Stamford After-Brunch" (2000). Three young wives laugh it up with Martinis and cigars, cozy on a couch in front of a windowed, sombre snow scene.

"The Moroccan" (2001). An elfin woman grins. There are three gleaming fish atop her head.

"Thanksgiving" (2003). Three manneristically distorted women perform strange rites around a raw turkey whose livid flesh is worthy of a seventeenth-century Flemish master of still-life.

I could go on. There is no such thing as a typical picture by Currin, whose style has evolved hopscotch-fashion, from one tour de force to the next. Each work is disturbing in its own way, presuming to understand, from the inside, a variant of humanity that it ridicules from the outside. In "Ms. Omni," the horror is that one can't help empathizing with the old bat; in "The Moroccan," it is that one can't but be amused by the abasement of someone patently adorable. You wouldn't think that resourceful, unremitting, honed offensiveness would be a winning artistic strategy. By rights, Currin's radical conservatism ought to disgust art-world cognoscenti, and conservatives should abhor his poisoned-sugar erotica. So what's up?

I hazard that in Currin's art manifold pleasure disarms revulsion—without eliminating it. He demonstrates the power of the aesthetic to overrule our normal taste, morality, and intellectual convictions. Beauty and wit occasion holidays from habits of mind which, though our own, seem, for the moment, arid and boring. The subject matter of "Stamford After-Brunch" may appear mean and trivial; but the painting is an inexhaustible

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

*Currin, with his son: judging from his sudden prestige, his example has changed the climate of expectation in contemporary art.*

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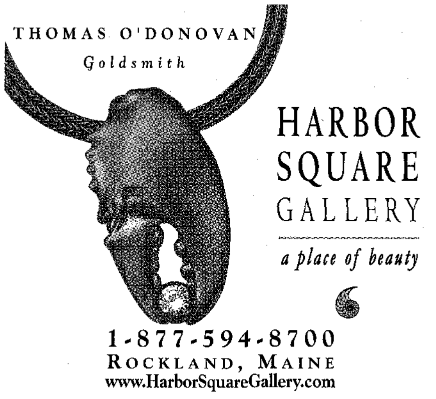
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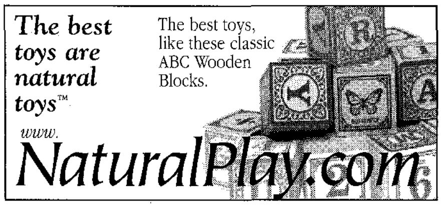
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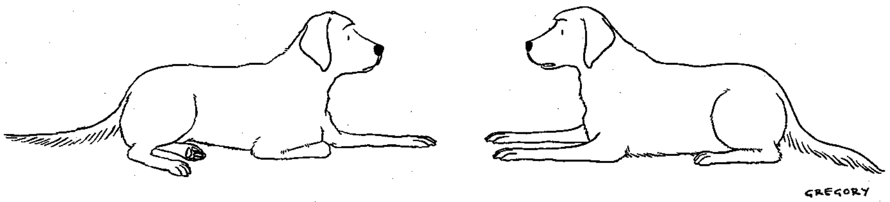
joy to behold. Currin hooks us by rewarding capacities for knowledge and experience which most major art of the last half-century repressed. Why that long reign of austerity was a good idea is increasingly hard to remember.

Currin is important philosophically for calling the bluff of postmodern theorists who reject myths of progress in art while maintaining avant-gardist postures that lean on those myths. If, after all, we are not striding a hallelujah trail to Utopia—if the past, far from being left behind, inundates the present, and high and low culture defy being separated—why not directly avail ourselves of whatever, having once pleased, may please anew? Currin, like two of his contemporaries, the exciting figurative painters Elizabeth Peyton and Lisa Yuskavage, dispenses with irony—the nervous signal that, of course, one is smarter than some antique or vulgar material at hand would suggest. Currin is sincere. His motive in a given work may be palpably sentimental, hostile, slaphappy, self-loathing, or otherwise miserable. It doesn't matter, as long as his artistry takes over.

Currin puts art history in play. Reviewing the Whitney show in the *Times*, Michael Kimmelman made apposite references to Mantegna, Pontormo, Hans Baldung, van Eyck, Dürer, Annibale Carracci, Houdon, Goya, Otto Dix, Christian Schad, Francis Picabia, Norman Rockwell, Balthus, Lucian Freud, Paul Cadmus, van Meegeren (the forger of Vermeers), Gerhard Richter, and Jeff Koons. And the eminent art historian Robert Rosenblum, writing for the show's catalogue, found opportunity, without undue strain, to drop more than fifty names, including those of Piero di Cosimo, Botticelli, El Greco, Courbet, Renoir, Roy Lichtenstein, George Petty (the girlie illustrator), Frank Frazetta (the science-fiction illustrator), and Todd Haynes (the filmmaker). It is pleasant to know things. It is a delight to find one's knowledge anticipated and engaged.

Conflict is a given in responding to Currin's art. The precedents and associations that he invokes spark warring reactions. But these add up to less than the whole of the work's effect. Something is left over that calls for one of the grand old terms of aesthetics: mystery, sublimity, transcendence. (That dead turkey in "Thanksgiving" goes places, in cultural time and psychic space, that astound.) The undecidability of the work's meaning forces a perusal of Currin's virtuosity—his phenomenally subtle drawing and eloquent touch. One wonders at it. I feel that Currin wonders at it, too. His talent and his omnivorous curiosity discipline the chaos of his emotions. It's as if painting itself, as the muse, commanded the work's development. This is not a novel thought about how art transpires, but the mechanics of inspiration are so neglected, in our overdeliberate time, that it seems exotic.

Is there something brittle and tinged with hysteria about Currin's synthesis of elements that consort like cats in a sack? There is. Here is one master unlikely to have successful disciples. However, judging from his sudden prestige, his example has changed the climate of expectation in contemporary art. He has rehabilitated fallen practices of visual storytelling, restoring to painting its ancient functions of illustration and rhetorical persuasion. Most of all, he has established a model of the art work as the embodiment of a specific argument with and about life. The content of Currin's beefs and raptures—a comedy of anxious, defiant manhood—is nutty, but his art gives the force of truth. To trash Currin's apparent attitudes is easy enough but, as Kim Levin seems to have discovered, remarkably unavailing. He announces a situation in which artists, wielding art, trump critics who enforce ideas. If his paintings are to be effectively countered, it must be by other, newer, better paintings. ♦



*"Sure, he seems like a dog person, but I'll reserve judgment until after the primaries."*

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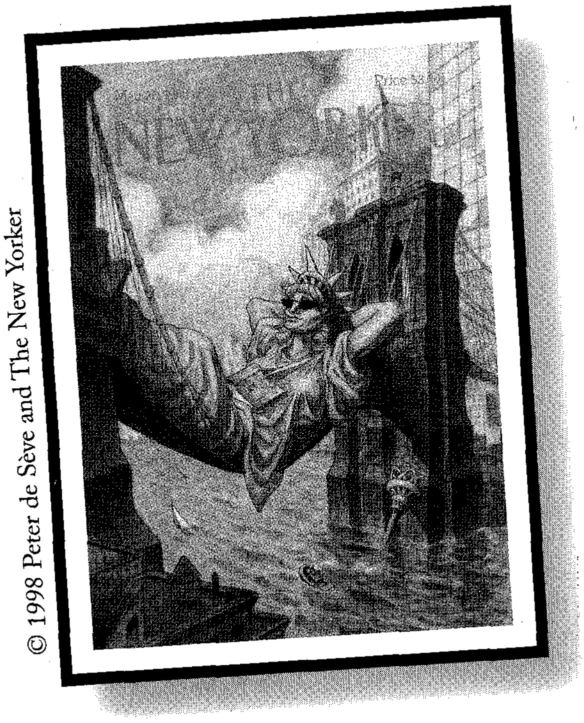

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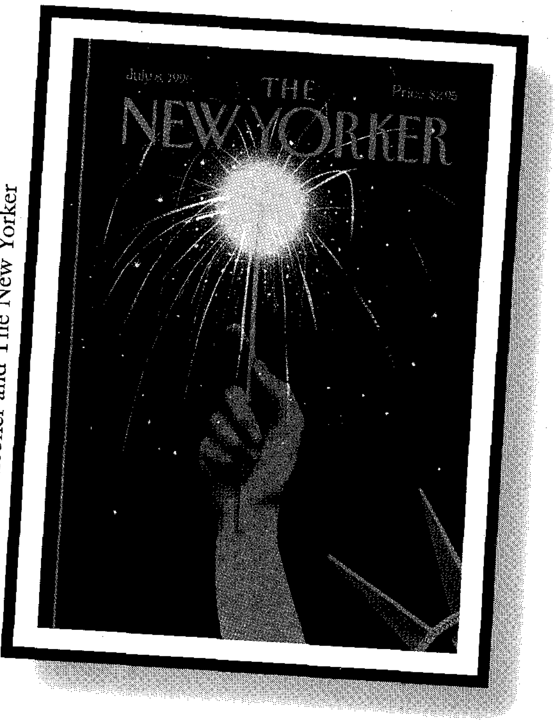

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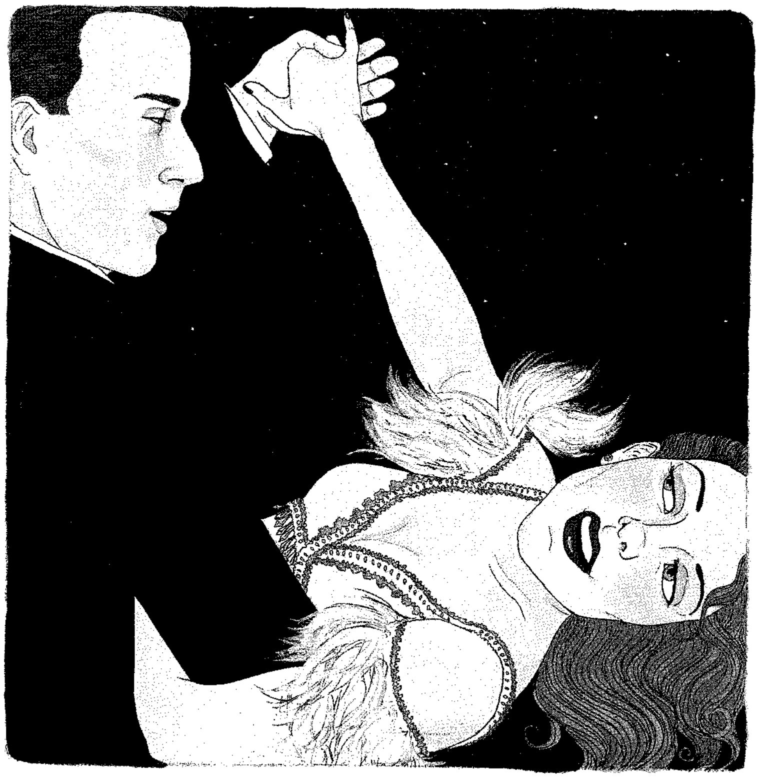
THE THEATRE

# DANCE-OFF

*Love and tap in "Never Gonna Dance."*

BY HILTON ALS



*The show is an homage to "Swing Time" and a comment on the era it grew out of.*

Deidre Goodwin is a lioness of sorts. She's the kind of performer who is as fiercely protective and nurturing of her talent as Elsa was of her cubs in the 1966 sudser "Born Free." With her long, muscular limbs and shrewd, darting eyes, she is always on the hunt for prey. Sometimes that takes the form of a man; other times it's a musical number. Either way, she tears into whoever or whatever she's doing with considerable intelligence and feline ferocity.

And, like a lioness who knows every inch of her terrain—in Goodwin's case, it's the stage—she knows just when to strike. In the small but pivotal role of Velma in the new musical "Never Gonna Dance" (at the Broadhurst), Goodwin is a hoofer who's been around a long time and is tired of getting little or no financial remuneration. At the beginning of the show, she and her partner, Spud (the strong and fine Eugene Fleming), are entering a dance contest. They're acting for the judges: why, we're just li'l ol' country kids, a brother-and-sister act. But for them the real prize is getting one over on those dim-witted ofays. Velma and Spud are lovers; they want to use the prize money to buy some time to rest and soak their feet.

Velma is cynical about show business in general, but she never reveals her fatigue. Nevertheless, her cynicism is in her eyes, or conveyed in a shrug of her shoulders. She smiles only when she has to, getting it up to make believe she's not as world-weary or as street-smart as she is—but then the smile feels forced, almost strident. Generally, Velma uses her energy to feed her feminine wiles, the better to survive, and to draw blood with her talent. Goodwin is thrilling to watch, because she's dangerous, a dark, albeit brilliant force that could just as easily fill a stadium as a stage with her powerful presence, quick turns, high kicks, scissor splits, and deep contralto.

You might remember Goodwin from the 2002 Oscar-winning film "Chicago," which this show owes a lot to. She played one of the "merry murderesses" on a Jazz Age death row made even harder and spookier by Catherine Zeta-Jones and Renée Zellweger. Goodwin, convicted of killing her husband, declared her innocence and danced her passion; she had a retro look and a dramatic strength that blew her co-murderesses away. (Watching Goodwin in the film and now here, I thought it might be interesting to see her in a non-dancing, yet still physically demanding role—Charlotte Corday, perhaps, in "Marat/Sade"—to get a better sense of her range.) I'm assuming that Harvey Weinstein, who is one of the producers behind "Never Gonna Dance," and who also produced "Chicago," had a hand in casting her. Weinstein knows a star when he sees one.

Based on the classic 1936 musical "Swing Time," starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, "Never Gonna Dance" is as much an homage to the film as it is a comment on the era that it grew out of. (The title of the current show is among those which the producers of the film rejected before settling on "Swing Time.") As in the film, Lucky Garnett (Noah Racey) is a dancer who's on the verge of marrying up. He's a vaudevillian only half in love with his intended, the snooty and precious small-town heiress Margaret Chalfont (Deborah Leamy). Show business has Lucky by the wedding tails, but Margaret's Republican father disdains his profession and will condone the marriage only if Lucky can raise twenty-five thousand dollars *not* by dancing. Tap dancing, Mr. Chalfont implies, is not a grownup activity. The buck-and-wing? Lower you cannot get.

No sooner is Lucky in the train station, headed for New York in search of loot and good fortune, than he's pulled back into movement as his dancer's ears pick up on the rhythms that surround him: newspapers being stacked, coffee being hawked, passengers scurrying across marble floors. The choreographer, Jerry Mitchell, and the director, Michael Greif, handle this and the rest of the show with great sophistication and effervescence, which is exactly what the material requires.

By having Lucky dance against his will—the boy can't help it—Mitchell and Greif flip the show's relative realism right over into surrealism and champagne, tickling our minds and our noses. The plot becomes sillier, and we believe it. In Depression-bleak Manhattan, the panhandlers are cute and no one lacks for taxi fare. On his first day in Gotham, Lucky meets the dance instructor Penny Carroll (Nancy Lemenager) when she's given his lucky quarter in change and he wants it back. In short order, the duo is snagged by a producer to dance on a radio show devoted to discovering amateurs. So are Velma and Spud. A rivalry ensues. Velma and Spud are not amateurs. Neither are Lucky and Penny.

Unfortunately, Lemenager is one, and Goodwin inadvertently shows up her deficiencies. Penny is coy and cute, a living doll with strawberry-blond sausage curls, and her innocence—she's a holdout for true love—recalls cornflowers and white picket fences. She's a dream date, an idealized wife figure who makes Lucky's heartstrings go zing and his legs wobble. Lemenager's Penny isn't really a character, and though Lemenager works like a Trojan to make us feel something about her, Penny's inner conflicts barely cause a ripple. Lemenager fully registers only when she's in Racey's arms. When she dances with him, you can see how tough and persistent a performer she is, and how she'll grow into the underwritten part. But there's no bass or gravitas underlying her thin soprano. Like most symbols of goodness, she's a little bit of a drag—hollow and Pepsodent white.

But at least she's honest. Only Penny can say who she is outright; the others dissemble, lest the fantastical social order, which has been based on lies and mistaken identity, be upset. ("The Importance of Being Earnest" is the modern model for all such plots.) It's a farce—"As You Like It" dressed up in Ruby Keeler shorts and finger waves. And, like most farces, "Never Gonna Dance" is about nothing being what it's supposed to be; in the end, all missed

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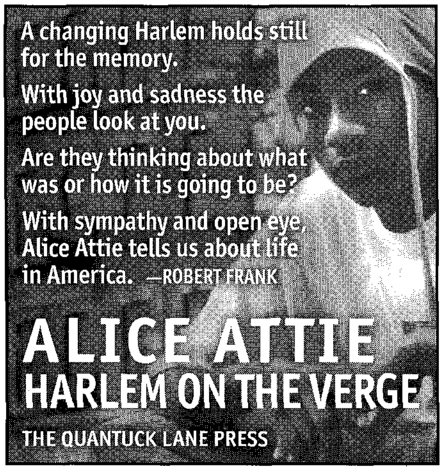
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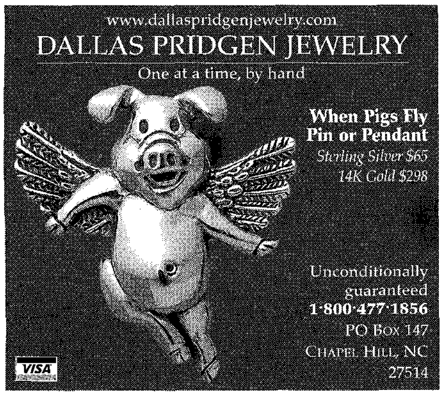
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connections, misperceptions, and misunderstandings have been resolved, and by then the audience is supposed to have fallen in love with the characters. By and large, we have.

We've grown particularly fond of Goodwin and Racey. His Lucky is one of the most touching physical manifestations of romantic love that you'll ever see, in part because he's slightly embarrassed by his need. When, near the close of the first act, he and Penny pay a visit to the top of the unfinished skyscraper where they're meant to dance in the upcoming competition, he sings Dorothy Fields's haunting ballad "The Way You Look Tonight." After a couple of bars, you're in tears, because Racey sings it as a lullaby of yearning, which it is. "Someday, when I'm awfully low / When the world is cold / I will feel a glow just thinking of you," he intones. What makes Racey's delivery so affecting is that his feelings are exactly like romantic love: elusive as a bird held in your hand. Unclench your hand—as you must, eventually—and it's gone forever.

Racey is a strong dance partner with a clean line. He's not as effortless in his work as Astaire was, and he doesn't have anything approaching Astaire's signature ostrich-posing-as-a-peacock walk or attitude. (And Lemenager isn't as gorgeously tacky as Rogers could be.) Racey's performance is his own, and it's winning because he doesn't disguise how hard this ambitious show must be to perform. From the stupendous sets and costumes, by Robin Wagner and William Ivey Long, respectively, to the incredibly deft book, by Jeffrey Hatcher, there's a lot to feed the actors. In Hatcher's script, especially, the performers have a friend. Hatcher has folded into the work a variety of songs by a variety of lyricists and composers of the period, ranging from P. G. Wodehouse to Ira Gershwin and Johnny Mercer.

In a sense, "Never Gonna Dance" is a scrapbook of Depression-era reality made Art Deco shiny. It's surprising what the musical—a peculiarly American art form—can yield when it's hemmed in and then explodes convention. ♦

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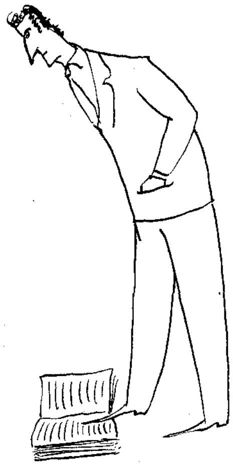

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BOOKS

# HIGHER AND HIGHER

*What tall buildings do.*

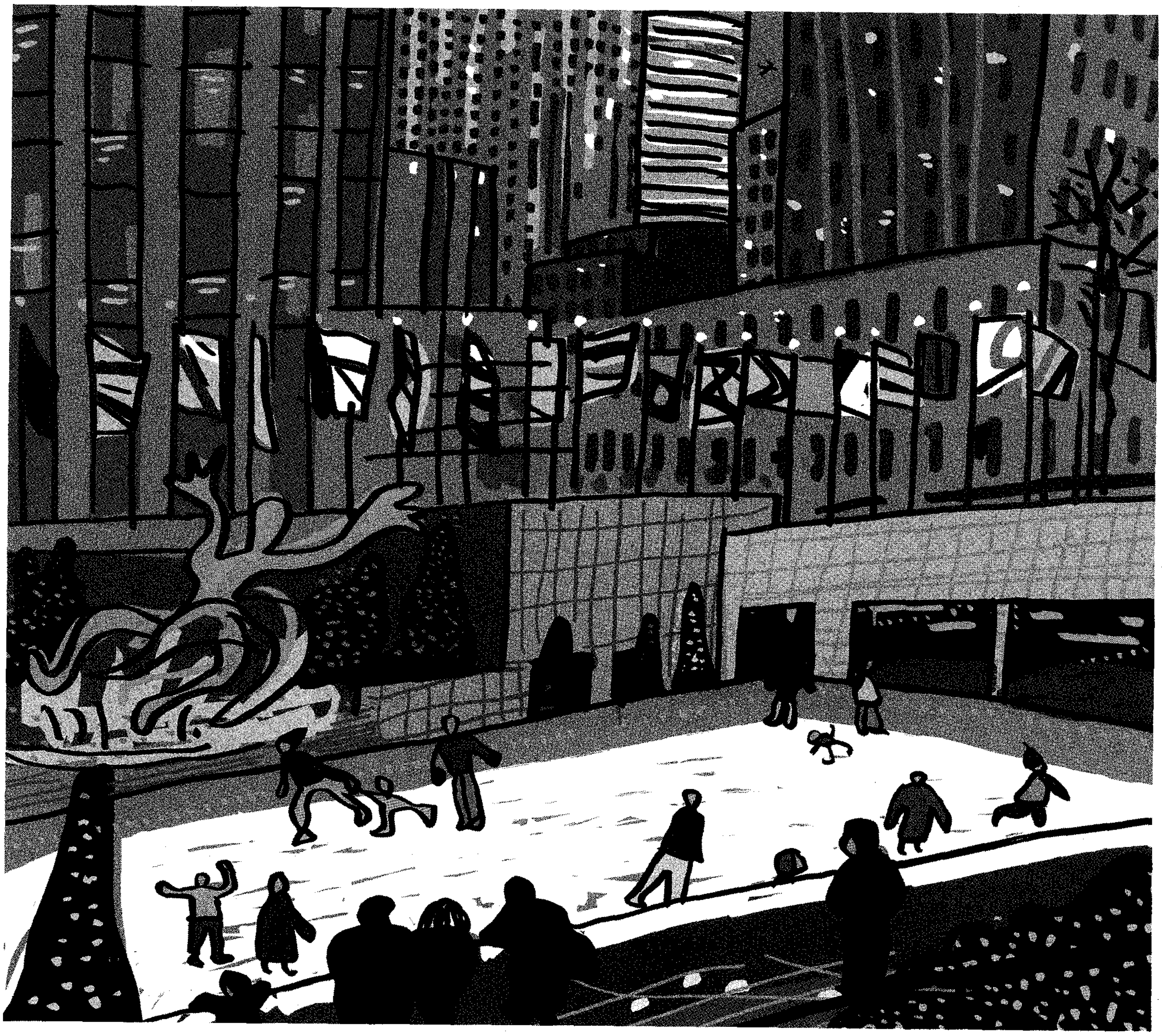
BY ADAM GOPNIK

"Heroic materialism," Kenneth Clark called the best of what the commercial culture of the past two centuries had made, at the close of his 1969 series "Civilisation," and he illustrated its triumph simply by standing on the bridge of the Staten Island ferry and peering out at the skyline of lower Manhattan, the spires high and gleaming. "Why are the public buildings so high?" another Englishman of the same Oxonian generation, W. H. Auden, who knew the squalid city rather better than Clark did, asked when he arrived. "Why, that's because the spirits of the public are so low." Between these two views, a dialogue goes back and forth about tall buildings and their meaning which is rooted, perhaps, in the whole idea of the heroic material. (Auden was a Christian when he wrote; Clark was not, yet.) The tall building is the symbol of all that we hope for—height, reach, power, and a revolving restaurant with a long wine list—and all that we cower beneath. It is a symbol of oomph and of waste, the lighthouse of commerce and the outhouse of capitalism, the tallest candle on the biggest cake, and the cash-economy prison made up of countless anonymous cells. The Bible gives us one tall building and leaves it unfinished, and ends with a shining city coming down from Heaven, but never says how many floors its towers have. When the Empire State Building was being built, as Neal Bascomb reveals in his new book, "Higher" (Doubleday; $26), the motive for its height was insistently said to be commercial—it was more economical, and the spire would be a place for wandering zeppelins to find a mooring—even though everyone knew that the real motive was just to be . . . *taller.*

The big tall building, though it has never been away as a thing, is newly potent as an idea, with, of course, a new sense of vulnerability attending it. Three of the best of the season's New York City books are about the history and future of the skyscraper, seen less as an inevitability, forced on us by circumstances and to be shaped as best we can, than as a metaphor, in the phrase of Guy Nordenson, the essayist in "Tall Buildings" (Museum of Modern Art; $29.95), the book accompanying the Museum of Modern Art's upcoming exhibition. The skyscraper's history is no longer materially driven (elevators, steel frames, a narrow and crowded island) but epic and individual, the heroic work of mostly forgotten architects and engineers and even construction foremen. At the same time, the buildings themselves are to be seen less as forces of commerce than as constructed conceits. The burden of Nordenson's essay is that the tall building, treated as an engineering marvel and an urban necessity throughout the twentieth century, stands before us now as just one more figure of speech, one more of the "diverse 'speech acts' in the large agoras of our modern cities," albeit acts with elevators and insurance.

To say that real, big things should be considered as metaphors shows some doubt in their realness, a will to dematerialize; the moment a thing becomes a mere figure of speech, its bright noon is past. Miracles become metaphors when we no longer really believe in saints. Now that tall buildings are for the first time fragile in our memory and imagination, susceptible to a morning's doom, we fill them with feelings, and accept that they are representations of our hopes, rather than wrappers of our necessities. The new tall-building books and shows in New York are, therefore, however outwardly optimistic, surely inwardly elegiac.

The startling thing about New York skyscraper-origin stories is how undramatic they are. The story begins, "And he decided to build the world's tallest building!" And what happened then? we ask, breathlessly. Oh: he built it. While some of the wonders of modernity have



*With its theatricality and its illusory gigantism, Rockefeller Center is a lost child of the turn-of-the-century World's Fair.*

JAVIER MARISCAL

wonderful histories—the suspension bridge, the airplane—others, just as wonderful, such as the color television and the skyscraper, are really committee work, rooted in principles that, once established, can only be refined, and, though the results may be great, they are no more glamorous than engineering usually is. When once you have thought of steel girders and elevators, to paraphrase Dr. Johnson, it is very easy to do all the rest. Among the more interesting people in the new skyscraper histories are the construction foremen, who took a radically unheroic attitude to their own heroics. ("Running up a building's like playing baseball," Frank Richards, the crew chief on the Chrysler Building, said once. "You've got to have a team. There isn't any more place in a steel gang for the individual star than there is on a baseball team." An odd remark, one might think, for a man living in the Babe Ruth era.)

In "Higher," Bascomb's account of the race at the end of the nineteen-twenties to build the tallest building in the world, we get one wonderful origin myth and eureka moment: an engineer sees his wife resting a heavy book on the family birdcage and realizes that a lightweight girded structure can carry an immensely heavy load. But the engineer's name is now forgotten, and, once the eureka moment has passed, we are left mostly with refinements of design rather than triumphs of the will. The real surprise in Bascomb's story is that, while the popular imagination—and the cover of the book—focusses on the Empire State Building, at Thirty-fourth Street, and the Chrysler Building, at Forty-second, as the subjects of the competition, attention at the time was centered on the race between William Van Alen's Chrysler and H. Craig Severance's now almost entirely overlooked Bank of the Manhattan Company Building, at 40 Wall Street. The Empire State Building appeared more or less out of nowhere, Florida Marlins style, rising up in a year and a half to win a contest that everyone thought was between two more famous competitors.

The fun in these books lies, as in the buildings, in the Art Deco details. There was a time when skyscrapers really were as civic-centered as cathedrals, and crusading photojournalists were attached to projects to give them an air of rectitude: Lewis Hine was hired by the Empire State Building to counter the Chrys-

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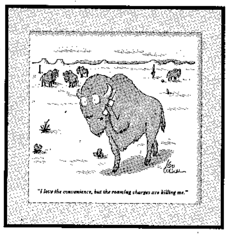
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ler team's Margaret Bourke-White. The most attractive portrait in "Higher" is of Walter Chrysler himself, who seems half-Trumpish and half Francis Ford Coppola's idealized Tucker, the entrepreneurial showman. A genuinely self-made man—he began life as a journeyman mechanic—he had got into the car business early, and kept going even in the shadow of Ford and General Motors. The Chrysler Building, though designed by Van Alen, was imagined by Chrysler. He wanted it tall, of course, but he also wanted it good, and most of all he wanted it *his*, bearing the sign and smell of his presence all over it: "Chrysler approved the tower design; he approved the parabolic curves of the dome; he approved the Rouge Flamme marble for the lobby, the heating units, and the steel office partitions." His motive was in part straightforwardly commercial—the Chrysler Building was a big ad for Chrysler cars—and in part Pharaonic: "He was building a 'monument' to himself, his company, and American ingenuity—and wanted it to be the tallest in the sky no matter the cost." He believed in buildings, in things, in a way that few tycoons now seem to.

With Chrysler, the urge to build was rooted in a timeless urge to self-expression and self-glorification; no medieval bell-tower builder would have had a hard time understanding him, or it. How more complicated feelings of civic ownership coexist with plutocratic power is one of the subjects of Daniel Okrent's "Great Fortune" (Viking; $29.95), an altogether stirring and vivid and enjoyable account of how Rockefeller Center got made, in the years from 1929 to 1939, and why it matters. The book's one weakness, ironically, is that the history Okrent recounts—moneys employed, civic energies stirred, architectural genius harnessed to collegial ends, and committee meetings used to achieve a near-perfect result in record time—is, once again, oddly lacking in drama. The subtitle identifies the subject as "the epic of Rockefeller Center," but this is an epic in which the Trojans put up token resistance, then lend money to the Greeks and get it back, while the gods up above have happy marriages and send down an occasional sapient bit of advice, and the war is won in four years and everyone goes home.

Given these constraints, Okrent does an admirable job, filling the book with all the thematic figures and polychrome murals and Radio City Rockettes that you could want. He tells the story of the elevator contractors (the construction manager for the center, one John R. Todd, got a good price because he insisted on contracting everything out all at once, so that no one was coming in for a price hike when last-minute panic set in), and of the follies of the early designs (an oval "hatbox"-shaped building was to stand on Fifth Avenue, directly in front of the Sunken Plaza). Okrent's story is depressing only in that it reminds us of how much luck has to hover over any large building project for it to turn out right. Nobody saw Rockefeller Center coming, including the Rockefellers. Even the name was pasted on at the last possible second, as a desperation marketing device, and then over the reluctance of the family. Before that, it was "Metropolitan Square," a carryover from Otto Kahn's original plan, which was to build a new home for the Metropolitan Opera in midtown, with some shops and offices nearby.

The standard myth—that at the height of the Depression the Rockefellers were civic-minded enough to build a massive development as a sign of faith in the city—is true to about a fourth approximation: John D. Rockefeller, Jr., or Junior, as he was called then and is called winningly throughout Okrent's book, did think after the crash that "there has been no financial and industrial crisis in the world's history so colossal in its magnitude, so far-reaching in its extent, and so serious in its character as the present one." But his old man, John, Sr., spent the time collecting bargains on the stock market, and in 1930 quaintly presented his beloved son with a bill for three and a half million dollars. Okrent gives the impression that Junior was not so much carried away by philanthropy as willing to be dragged along if it meant annoying his father. His real heart, it seems, belonged to building the Cloisters, uptown, while that of his wife, Abby Aldrich, belonged to the new Museum of Modern Art. He built Rockefeller Center, but he leased the land from Columbia University, didn't want his name on it, and would have been happy to see it all rented out to other people.

This makes him an admirable rich guy as rich guys go, but an unlikely hero. The

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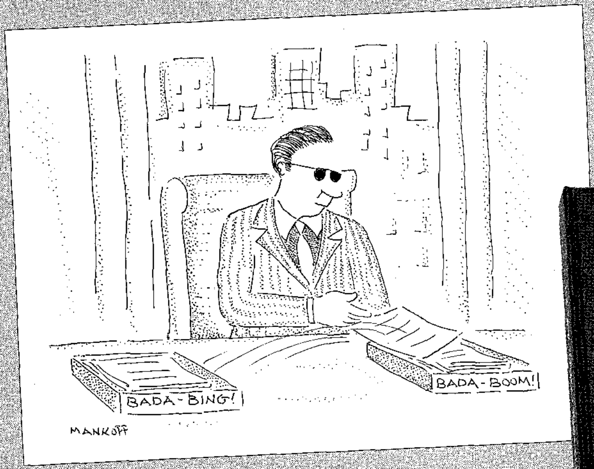
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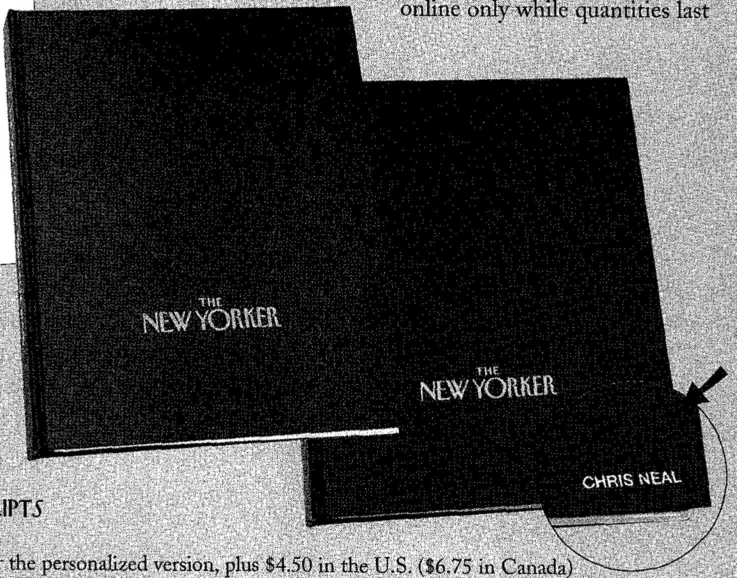
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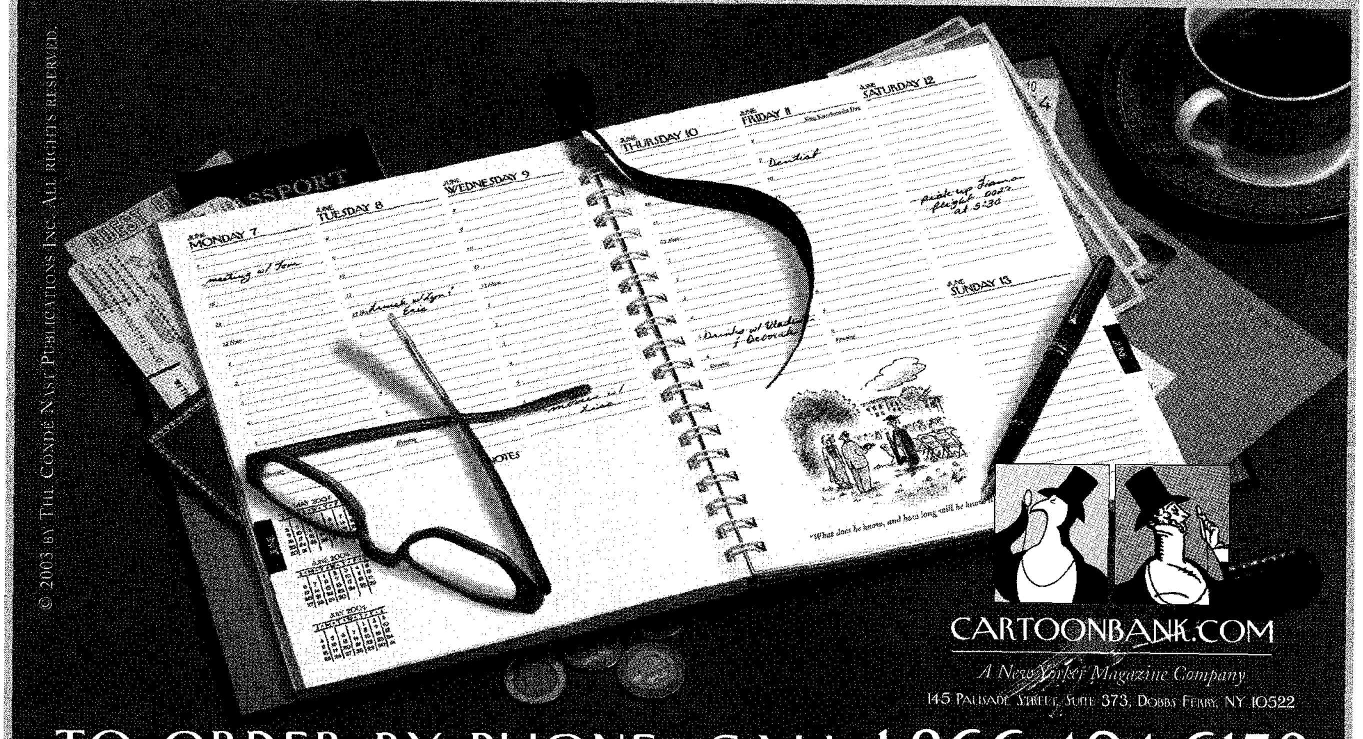
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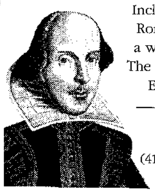
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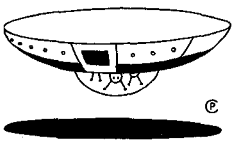
narrative is short a villain, too. Where the Roeblings had the bends to contend with as they built the Brooklyn Bridge, and Olmsted the plutocrats (and his own depressive nature), Rockefeller and his man Todd had to contend only with a couple of people who didn't want to sell their properties for what the developers wanted to pay, which makes the holdouts, in the Frank Capra version of the story, actually the heroes. Raymond M. Hood, who designed the RCA Building, emerges as the artistic hero, but he just happened to get the big building and get it right. As a personality, he is the very type of the corporate architect. (This is what Ayn Rand got wrong in "The Fountainhead": the ultimate romantic-colossal statement of romantic architectural colossalism could be built only by a timid corporate conformist; Howard Roark, like Frank Lloyd Wright, would have ended up with an automobile showroom and a smallish museum.)

Okrent does make a great deal, and to good point, of the rivalry-collaboration between Hood and Wallace Harrison, the other architect on the project, who was a much more advanced modernist, and who eventually became the Rockefeller family house architect. (He built the alarming Empire State Plaza, in Albany.) The irony is that any critic back then who knew which end was up would have recognized that Harrison's slabbish simplicities represented the future, while Hood's slatternly streamlinings were a quaint carryover from a dying Beaux-Arts tradition, however hard he tried to dress them up in Cubist clothes. ("A Beaux-Arts composition culminating in a Machine Age fortissimo" is Okrent's nicely epigrammatic summary of what was achieved.) Lewis Mumford, writing in *The New Republic* and in this magazine, made the point over and over as he attacked the plans, wishing for a modernist Corbusian "block" instead of a compromised Parisian concourse. Yet what makes Rockefeller Center wonderful is just that marriage of a dated decorative system with a cheap, secondhand vocabulary of modernist detailing.



Brooding on Hood and Harrison's rivalry, you might conclude that inarguable beauty, or at least good building, typically arises from backward style made in, and altered by, a radically progressive climate. (At least, this formula accounts for Botticelli, Praxiteles, Schubert, Fantin-Latour, and the RCA Building—not a bad haul.) This is not the same thing as a backward version of a radically progressive artistic style, as in the United Nations Headquarters (another charge of Wallace Harrison's)—the kind of sensibility that feels the pull of the new but can't go far enough. In cases like Rockefeller Center, the new is felt as a pull, but the old pulls back, too, and something pleasing happens between. (Mumford eventually got his Harrisonian-Corbusian version of Rockefeller Center in the "extension" that was built across Sixth Avenue in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, buildings that no one has ever looked at twice or entered with affection once.)

Okrent's book, if it cannot quite achieve epicality, does offer several by-the-way conclusions worth keeping. One is that the difference between wealthy families who feel they should build a building to keep the people happy and wealthy families who feel they should build a bunker to keep the people out is all the difference in the world. Junior was no Lorenzo de' Medici, but then Lorenzo de' Medici was no Lorenzo de' Medici. What mattered was that they made public gestures. (When art historians finally got around to cataloguing Lorenzo's collection, it was mostly gems and coins.) Okrent makes an implicit connection between the Rockefellers, starchy as only a family newly arrived to starch can be, and the vaudeville promoter S. L. (Roxy) Rothafel, who was given the assignment of designing what became Radio City Music Hall, and whose motto was "Don't give the public what they want. Give 'em something better." It was not that Rockefeller, in a burst of civic generosity, decided to go all out. It was that *everyone* then was expected to go all out. As in a thirties musical, excess was a given; the overhead shot of the hundred dancing girls was the minimal requirement for a night's fun. All the things that make Rockefeller Center immediately winning—the statues of Prometheus and Atlas, the molded glass bas-reliefs—were just part of what you were expected to do.

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yawn as they offer a peopleless "atrium" as an amenity. One reason for the change is that the thirties was a more ornamental time; another is that, as Okrent makes clear, the Rockefellers and their team felt themselves to be in implicit competition with the tyrants across the water, who seemed to be good at exactly this kind of massive, emotion-bearing building. There's an obvious overlap of Fascist and Socialist Realist styles with the corporate heroic style in the art of the center; it has often been noted that the face of Lee Lawrie's "Atlas" in front of the International Building looks a lot like Mussolini, while muscle-bound heroic workers led to a picture of Lenin. Competing systems come to look alike. Donald Trump, by contrast, is in competition only with Jerry Speyer; he isn't worrying about what Albert Speer is doing on the Party Congress Grounds in Nuremberg. (As all those super-towers go up in Shanghai and Beijing, though, this may change again. Rem Koolhaas is now being delirious in Beijing.)

Why, then, walking through Rockefeller Center, do we not feel, as we do when we stare at Mussolini's new city, EUR, in Rome, or even at the Palais de Chaillot, in Paris, which are relics of the same time and the same general style, a sick sense of being dwarfed by someone's bad idea of big? It may have something to do with Rockefeller Center's curious pedigree as the lost child of the turn-of-the-century World's Fair. The World's Fair, as a series of new histories have shown, was for the first part of the last century the dominant model of an orchestration of buildings and gardens: the gathering and mixing place, offering a particular type of moderne vista and, of course, a particular kind of tall decorative object, most obviously the Eiffel Tower. Rockefeller Center—with its central concourse shadowed by nationally themed buildings, which still exist at least as names, its instructive mottos and "recreational" set-asides, its slatted tower and small matching wings—has the mixture of stage-set perspectival architecture, educational improvement, theatricality, and uniformity that one recognizes in, say, Chicago's White City, or in the New York World's Fair of 1939, the one with the Trylon and the Perisphere. It even has the distinguishing feature of fair architecture, a kind of illusory gigan-

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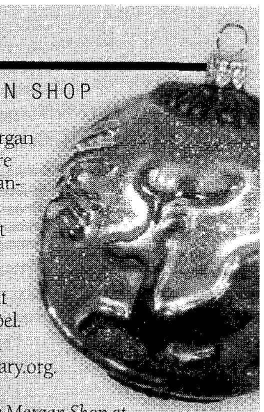

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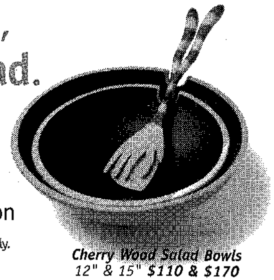

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tism. (The RCA Building is huge, but a slat, while the spaces of the Sunken Plaza and the Promenade are actually quite small, twenty steps across, and the skating rink is a postage stamp, as anyone knows who has tried to teach a kid to skate on it.)

And then it is not the ornament alone but the emphasis on façade and program, on symbolism, that makes it sing. It benefits from a symbolism so vague that you can project onto it pretty much anything you need. Okrent tells how Hood brought in a "thematic engineer," a Midwestern weirdo named Hartley Burr Alexander, who worked on the Century of Progress fair, in Chicago, in 1933, to provide a thematic program for the center. The document he came up with (arguing for a scheme in which "*experience* flanked by *history* and *science* . . . *understanding* flanked by *reason* and *sympathy*" would enliven the hearts of passersby) got thrown out, but one feels that a lot of his spirit, which was part of the spirit of the time, remains in the place, particularly in the unforgettable inscription, courtesy of Isaiah, underneath Lawrie's great Wisdom, above the entrance to the RCA Building: "Wisdom and Knowledge Shall Be the Stability of Thy Times." (The architects would have preferred the mystifying "Day Unto Day Uttereth Speech and Night Unto Night Showeth Knowledge," from Psalm 19.) All of this may point a lesson for the Ground Zero project. Don't worry about having too many architects; that works out fine. Worry about not having enough literal-minded nuts with thematic programs. (It was the moment when Daniel Libeskind said his tower would be 1,776 feet high that he won New Yorkers over.)

All these books help explain why we have tall buildings, but why is it that we like them? We are told, again and again, that very tall buildings are the center of civic life—those speech acts in the agora—but psychologically they work as emotional chimneys at the fringe, allowing our feelings about city life to escape into the sky. We like them best when they are seen from a lonesome distance: from the Great Lawn, or the Long Island Expressway. Up close they loom; from a distance, they reach up.

In this way, too, they are accelerators of an essential city emotion, the feeling of a welcome loss of self. The joy of city life is to become, if only for a spell, an anonymous and interchangeable nobody. Virginia Woolf, describing London, wrote that at home you had all that was yours, books and sofas and vases, each one labelled burdensomely with your experience. Step outside and you were blessedly less you, go further down the road and you were hardly you at all, walk far enough and long enough in the twilight, peering in windows, and you almost became, for a moment, the other lives you could see. Then you could retrace your steps, having slipped out of your own skin as effectively as a dream-walker. Woolf's London, though, was the perfect horizontal city, squares running into high streets running on into centers. New York is the vertical city, and the verticality makes our loss of self and the regaining of it happen all at once, just by looking up and looking down.

Only what we build takes us from what we feel to what we hope. Any building is an irrational statement of belief in a life after, or at least in the long term. Santa Maria della Salute in Venice and St. Paul's Cathedral in London respond to crises graver even than our own, and the oligarchy of merchants who built those churches was hardly more spiritual than our oligarchy of merchants. Reading of Chrysler and Rockefeller, we begin to wonder what, exactly, they possessed that their successors lack. It would be nice to say that they were more visionary, or more ambitious. But it is simply that they felt themselves to be on the defensive. Like the Medici in fifteenth-century Florence, or Whigs in nineteenth-century England, they understood that their rule was tolerated by a potentially combustible population, which had to be given things to look at and hope for.

Okrent's book reminds us that hope in a commercial culture almost always comes from an energized élite, handed down from the Rockefellers to the Rockettes (who then kick life back up to the billionaires, who are usually too worried to enjoy their own erections). What energizes them may be as decent as the urge to show off, or as cynical as the urge to give the public something more so they don't ask for something fair. The great skyscrapers of New York are there to remind us that, though buildings grow from the ground up, hope still falls from the top down. ♦

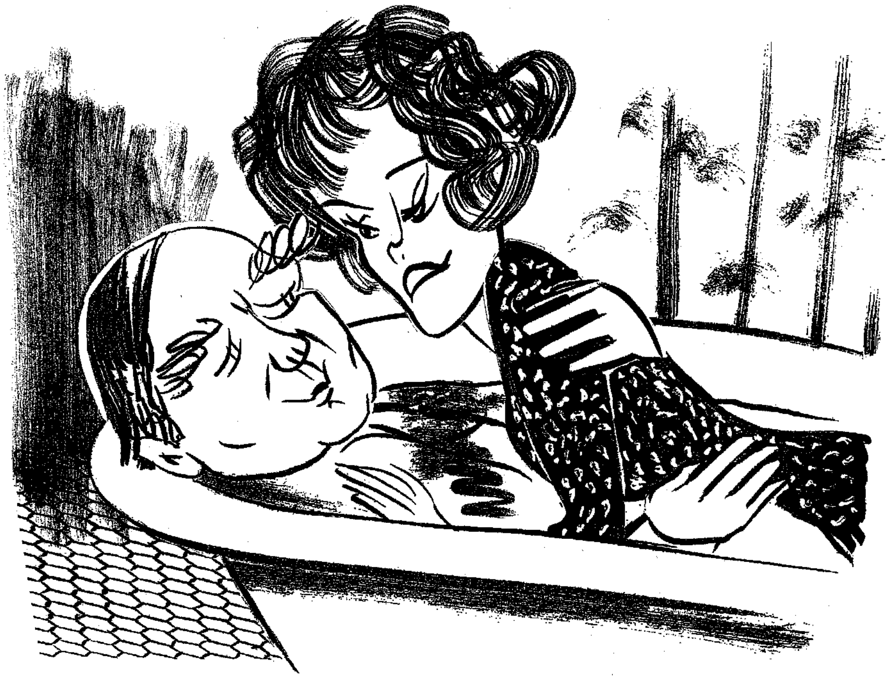
THE CURRENT CINEMA

# HIS STORY, HER STORY

*"Big Fish" and "Girl with a Pearl Earring."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

At the start of "Big Fish," our friendly narrator, Edward Bloom (Ewan McGregor), delivers the first of many homilies in his spicy Southern twang. "There are some fish that cannot be caught," he informs us. True, and there are some accents that shouldn't be attempted by a Scotsman. Edward is a native of Alabama, and "Big Fish" purports to trace the path of his unlikely life, daring us to believe in every kink. It is the kind of movie in which a baby is not just born; it pops from the womb and slides along the hospital floor.



*Albert Finney and Jessica Lange in Tim Burton's new movie.*

TOM BACHTELL

The tale is split among different tellers, cutting from one to the next. It is Edward himself who takes us through the highlights of his boyhood, including a nighttime visit to the local witch. (She is played in full crone mode by Helena Bonham Carter, the belle of the film's director, Tim Burton, who previously cast her as a monkey in "Planet of the Apes." Was there ever a grittier effort to cast off one's early roles?) And so we lurch into Edward's adulthood, which entails, among other things, a job at the circus, a brief tour of military duty in the Far East, an even briefer excursion into crime, and the wooing of Sandra (Alison Lohman), his fair young bride. This last project comes to fruition with a mass planting of daffodils beneath the beloved's window and may, in the annals of cinema, mark the first successful deployment of Wordsworth as a flirtation device.

Meanwhile, in a more grounded mood, the aging Edward, now played by Albert Finney, lies in bed and slowly dies, chewing over his past. He is attended by his son, Will (Billy Crudup), who has been estranged from Edward for years, but who, wishing to be present for the final curtain, has now travelled from Europe with his French wife. This is all weirdly reminiscent of another current movie, Denys Arcand's "The Barbarian Invasions," and, should you choose to admit Ang Lee's "The Hulk" as further evidence, 2003 does seem to have

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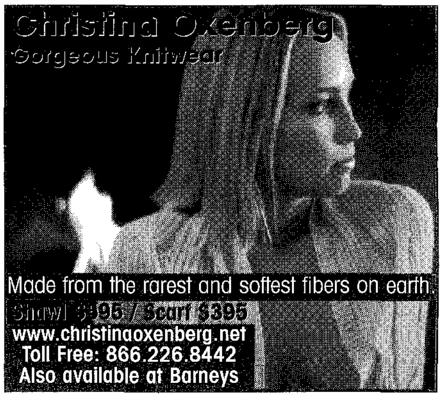

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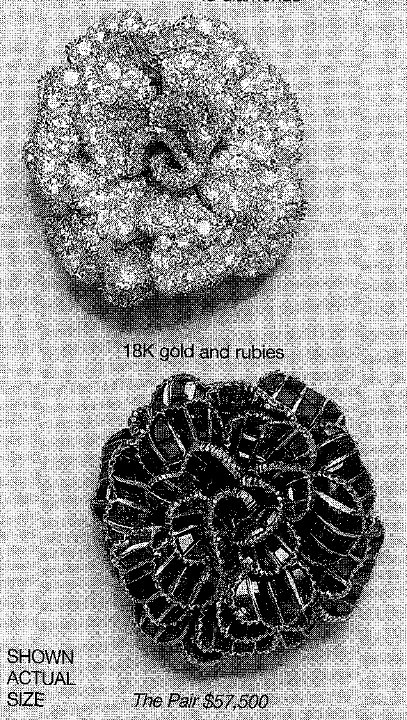

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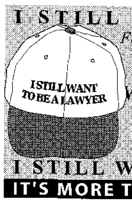

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been the year for fathers and sons, and for the hesitant defrosting of relations between the two. Whether the list signals a coincidence, a fad, or some more mysterious pattern none of us can yet say, but it may be worth asking, amid the rise of the filial drama, where did the love stories go? What hope for boy-meets-girl when our screens are pullulating with son-hugs-dad?

You could argue that Burton has been here before, in the awkward, not to say lethal, ache of Edward Scissorhands and his paternal creator. But that was a steely affair, whereas the only danger in "Big Fish" is the constant menace of mush. Poor Billy Crudup gets the grimmest part, required to look soulful and perplexed as he strives to piece together Edward's unreliable memories: "In telling the story of my father's life, it's impossible to separate the fact from the fiction, the man from the myth," he says, neglecting to add that in writing a screenplay it's possible to separate the cliché from the living language. What is most disappointing about "Big Fish" is the nervousness of its fantasizing—a strange unwillingness, new in Burton's work, to trust the wit of the audience. Does the man who tossed us, without ado, into the candy-colored fun house of Pee-wee Herman really need to preface a scene full of jumping spiders, in the new movie, with a shot of our hero holding up a cobwebbed sign that reads "Beware Jumping Spiders"? When Burton made "Beetlejuice," with its floating heroine and shrunken heads, or "Batman Returns," resounding to the meow of Michelle Pfeiffer, he was happy to snow us with crystalline images and hope that some would settle in our mind's eye, whereas "Big Fish" doles out its magic with a dogged simplicity and, in so doing, makes us feel like contented fools. The last movie that performed such a trick, by the way, was "Forrest Gump." You have been warned.

To be sure, there are moments here that nobody but Tim Burton could have conjured. When the young Edward is racked with growing pains, his bed is transformed into a clanking contraption designed to stretch those muscles; and there is something touching in the sight of the old Edward wearing his pajamas in the bath and inviting his wife—played by Jessica Lange, no less—to join him for a wallow. The sequence is all the more precious because Lange has so little to do elsewhere. As a rule, "Big Fish" is only fleetingly interested in women, and those who do crop up tend to be more fancied than fleshed out. Such feyness is a built-in hazard, I guess, of the sentimental picaresque. Early on, we see Ewan McGregor addressing a gang of Boy Scouts around a campfire, and something of that male preserve—the coy, self-protective air of the yarn-spinner, cringing from female sense and sexuality—lingers and glows throughout the picture.

How you react to "Big Fish" will depend on whether you think that a talent like Tim Burton's—hard, snickering, and childlike—should be encouraged, or allowed, to grow up. To me, the process looks more like softening up, and I remain allergic to any movie director who still insists on hauling his camera to the circus. Shouldn't there be a ban on big tops in cinema? I love Burt Lancaster, a trained acrobat, but not in "Trapeze"; the sight of Jimmy Stewart in clown makeup, for "The Greatest Show on Earth," is some kind of crime against humanity; and even the glittering set pieces of "Lola Montès" leave sawdust in my mouth. It's such an exhausted trope, and such an easy excuse for a surrealist like Burton to wheel on the freaks. There is a giant named Karl in "Big Fish," played by the towering Matthew McGrory. He has a lopsided sadness to him that you can't get out of your head and a bass voice that drums in your ear, but, in the end, he seems used by the movie, which will go to any lengths, or heights, to sell its own devotion to the tall tale.

How many of today's actresses would be prepared to step into the shoes of Griet, the eponymous heroine of "Girl with a Pearl Earring"? And how many would pull out once they realized that the shoes were, in fact, clogs? All credit to Scarlett Johansson, then, not only for taking the role but for devising a superbly inelegant walk—flat, clumping, and determined, the gait of a woman who has been bred to labor for a living wage and to expect nothing more. Yet something more is sprung upon her. The year is 1665, and Griet goes to work in the house of Johannes Vermeer. The painter is already in thrall to his black moods, his perennially pregnant wife, his formidable mother-in-law, and, given time and space, his art. Now, little by little, the new servant drifts into his view.

Peter Webber's first film is based on Tracy Chevalier's novel of the same name—a ripe reconstruction of an age, told through the imagined voice of Griet. We lose that first-person narration in the movie, and the outcome is a little more stolid—Griet all but vanishes into the damp stone of her surroundings as she paces beside the canals. That may strike some viewers as undramatic, but it comes with a historical kick. The Griets of that world were not *meant* to be seen, and it is through the good offices of Vermeer, de Hooch, and their contemporaries—the sanctifying calm of their gaze—that we know of such underlings now. The movie, which was shot by Eduardo Serra, wants to scrape itself against the texture of their days, which is why, for all the elegant re-creation of Dutch interiors, with their sifted sidelighting, we are also dragged to the street market, and to its stinking heads of oxen, as a sanguine reminder that elegance alone is not enough.

Nevertheless, anybody who balks at slowness will be driven up the wall by this movie, not least by the shortfall of its romance. Years of Hollywood training lead us to expect that Colin Firth, as Vermeer, will come on strong to Scarlett Johansson—to assume that desire, like art, must surge across all boundaries. But, if ever a society was bounded, it was Holland in the seventeenth century, and, in defense of such decorum, I would say that the repression going on between Firth and Johansson is more of a turn-on than most of the hot news that movies like to bring us from twenty-first-century bedrooms. Watch the two of them huddled beneath the blackout cloth of a camera obscura, or Vermeer showing Griet how to grind shellac and lapis lazuli (the shards even sound delicious in the hand) while preparing his pigments. Best of all, look closely at Johansson as she puts on the pearl earring and sits for the portrait by which she will, unknowingly, be granted immortal life. Instructed to moisten her lips so as to catch the light, she doesn't do anything so lubriciously modern as to show her tongue, but gently sucks each lip in like a lozenge—a dazzling detail in what is, by any standards, an immaculate period performance. Johansson, who won the role after Kate Hudson stepped aside, makes no attempt to look pretty; indeed, in the fullness of her figure, and in the breadth of her cheekbones and brow, she displays that mixture of piety and earthiness that we associate with landscapes less urbane than Delft's, and with artists less given to quietude. "Girl with a Pearl Earring" is a tense and civilized tribute to Vermeer, and it is unthinkable without the poise of its leading lady. Yet, if Rembrandt could have glimpsed her, he, likewise, might have reached for his brush. ♦

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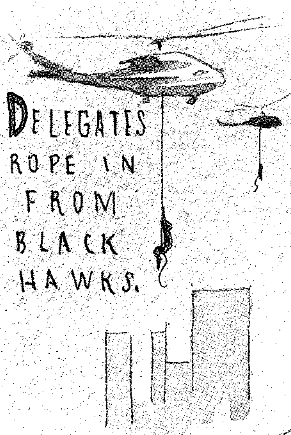

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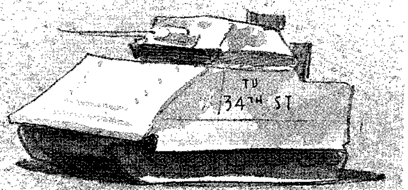

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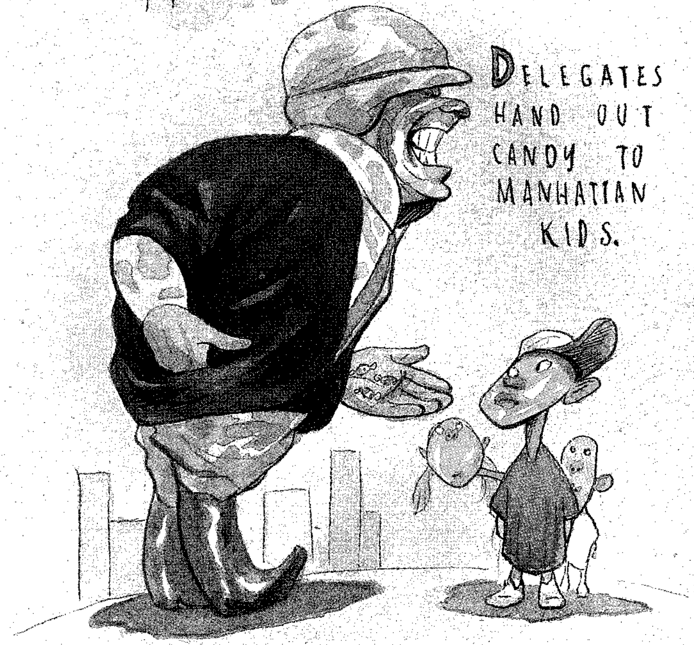
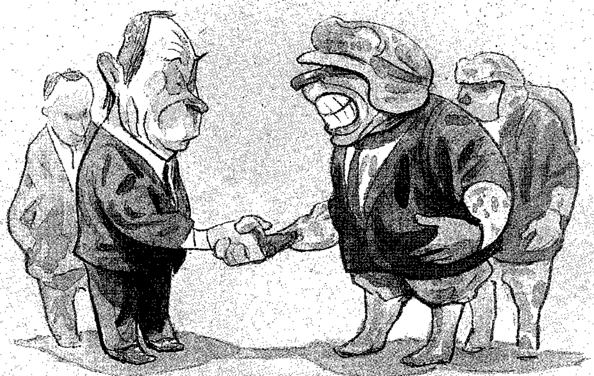
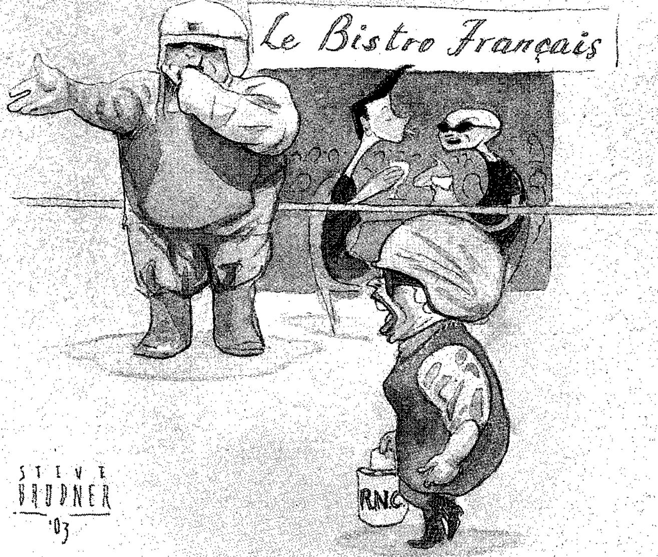


DELEGATES HAND OUT CANDY TO MANHATTAN KIDS.



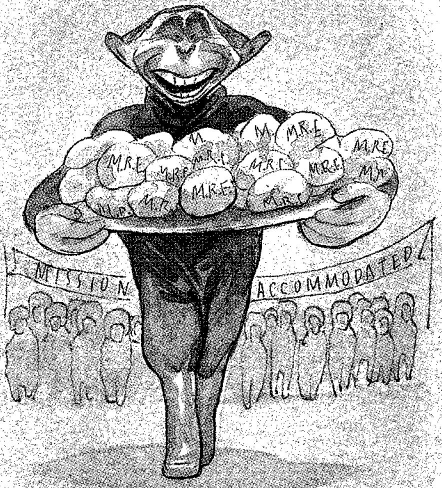
CONVENTIONEERS MEET WITH NEW YORK GOVERNING COUNCIL.

M.P.s PROVIDE ESCORTS PAST POCKETS OF RESISTANCE.



Le Bistro Français
RNC

STEVE BRODNER '03



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